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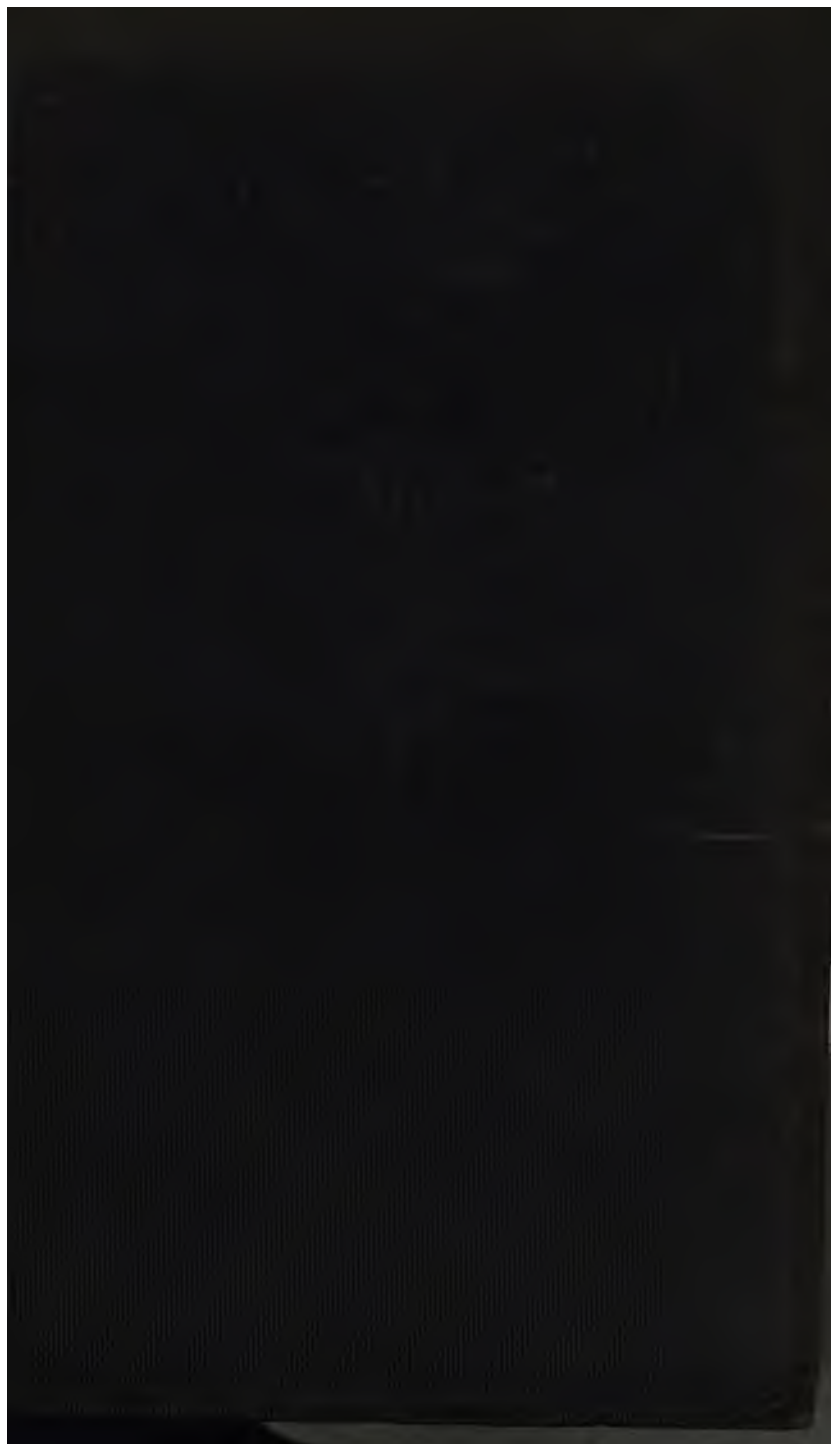
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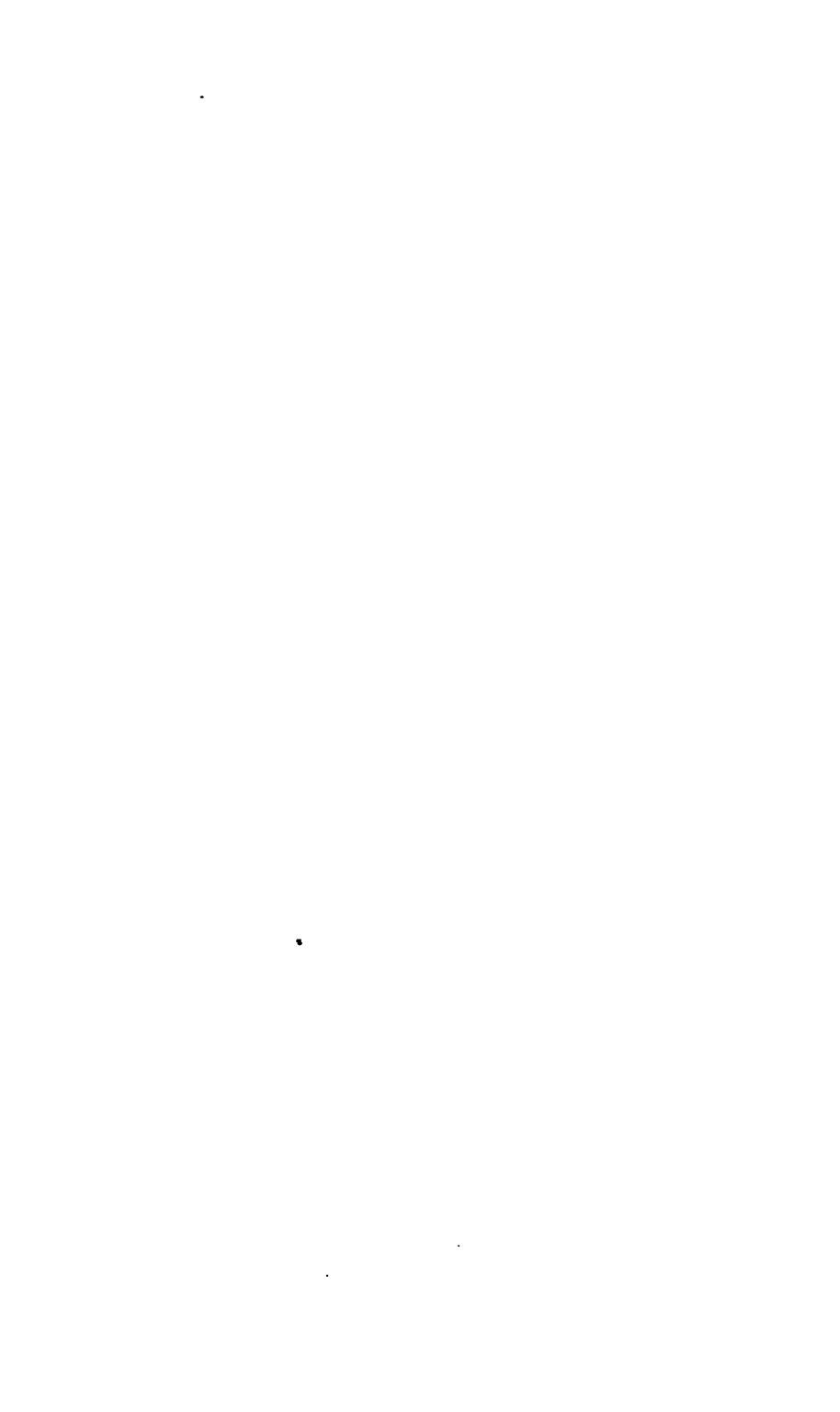


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VILLAGE DISCOURSES.

VILLAGE DISCOURSES:

BEING

TEN PARTING SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF WATTON, HERTS.

BY THE

REV. T. R. BIRKS, A.M.

FELLOW AND PREACHER OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE;
AND RECTOR OF KELSHALL, HERTS.

SEELEY, BURNSIDE, AND SEELEY,
FLEET STREET, LONDON.
MDCCCXLV.



LEONARD SEELEY, THAMES DITTON, SURREY.

TO THE PARISHIONERS OF WATTON;
THIS LITTLE VOLUME,
THE SUBSTANCE OF DISCOURSES ADDRESSED TO THEM,
AS HIS PARTING MESSAGE;
IS DEDICATED, WITH AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE, AND
EARNEST DESIRES FOR THEIR SPIRITUAL WELFARE;
BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND IN CHRIST,

T. R. BIRKS.



NOTICE.

THE original object of these Sermons is explained by the title and dedication. As their chief object was to present the great truths of the gospel in a simple form, when about to leave a congregation before whom I had been allowed to minister for several years, I am led to hope that they may perhaps be made useful to others also. With this view they are now offered to the public. Their title alone will be a caution to those who look for original and profound thought, or laboured eloquence, to resort elsewhere; but I trust that the truths which they contain, however simple and unadorned, may, with God's blessing, sink into the hearts of other Christians, besides those for whom they are especially designed.

*Kelshall Rectory,
March 17, 1845.*



SERMON I.

PSALM CXXXIX. 1.

O LORD, THOU HAST SEARCHED ME, AND KNOWN ME.


THESE words are few and simple, but how vast and unsearchable is the truth which they reveal ! It is one which lies at the foundation of all true godliness. It gives power and solemnity to every doctrine of God's word. To walk in the light of this truth is the life of heaven upon earth, a foretaste of that fulness of joy which is in God's presence for evermore.

Every verse of Holy Scripture is like a star of the firmament. When we look on it carelessly, and at a distance, it seems a mere speck of light, and may be soon overlooked and forgotten. But when we draw nearer, and look on it closely, we find in it a whole world of truth. Years and ages might pass away, before we could explore all its various regions, and the unknown wonders of Divine power, and grace, and wisdom, which they reveal. So it is with the words before us. They are soon read, and as soon forgotten ; but

eternity will never exhaust all the treasures of wisdom which they contain. Let us meditate, first, on the great doctrine itself, the heart-searching presence of our Maker ; and then on the practical lessons to which it should lead us. May the Holy Spirit himself, who searcheth all things, even the deep things of God, apply the truth with a Divine power to our souls.

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. The belief or neglect of this truth will make the eternal separation between those who are saved, and those that perish. The sinners who forget God have the solemn warning given them—they *shall be turned into hell*; but those who, like Enoch, walk with God, will be translated, like Enoch, to paradise, and dwell in God's presence for ever. It is a truth which applies to us at all times, and in all places, to our sins, our duties, and our acts of worship. It becomes still fuller and more precious, when we connect it with the various attributes of God, the person of the Lord Jesus, and the quickening power of the Holy Spirit.

It applies to all times and seasons. The Psalmist connects it here with the light of day and the darkness of night ; with the weakness of infant years, and the hours of the early morning. "Thou compasses my path by day, and my bed by night : when I awake I am still with thee." We ought, in like manner, to apply it to each passing season, as a truth that is ever new, and always of most solemn and weighty interest to our souls.



Every morning, when we rise from slumber, the Lord searcheth and knoweth us. Before our dull thoughts wake into new life, or our eyes open to the light of day, his thoughts are fixed on us, and his holy eyes, that never slumber, are gazing on our souls. When the first sounds of the morning greet us, his ears are already open, to hear the secret voice of our heart, to note the vain thoughts of the sinner, and receive the prayers of his people. Every thing that our waking eyes look upon is a pledge to us of his holy presence. "He maketh the outgoings of the morning to praise Him." It is his sun that shines on us, his heavens that are spread over us, and his earth on which we tread. "His mercies are new every morning; every morning he bringeth his judgments to light." (Lam. iii. 23. Zeph. iii. 5.) And if once our souls were fully awake to their true condition, and to the presence which is always around us, the first voice of our hearts when we arise, would be the words of the Psalmist—*O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me!*

Every evening, when we lie down, this presence is with us still. The Lord of heaven, though unseen, abides with you, when it is toward evening, and the day is far spent (Luke xxiv.). He sustains your wearied bodies, and your exhausted powers of mind. At the close of each day he notes its sins and its mercies, and gazes into every secret of the soul. The darkness is no darkness with him, but clear as the day. He searches and knows every careless

sinner, that retires to rest without one thought of his presence, and notes every evening prayer of his believing people. He makes the sun to know his going down, and spreads the veil of night as a shadow for his children in their hours of rest. Even in midnight silence, and deep slumber on our bed, his presence is still near us, and the holy God, whom angels worship with veiled face, is searching us and knowing us still.

The same truth applies to all the various seasons of human life. It is true in the hours of infancy and early childhood. Even from the hour of our birth, every spring of thought and action has been known unto our God. He perfects strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, and is the hope of his people from their mother's breast. Look back on the days where memory itself fails you—that earliest dawn of being and thought, which you cannot retrace and remember; the living God sees and knows them. Your weakness, your wants, your infant hours, the sins and follies of childhood, all are open to his view. It is He who warns us—"The wicked, as soon as they are born, go astray, and speak lies,"—and who adds the gracious promise, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me." And thus when we trace the whole course of life, at every step we have to repeat the prayer, "Remember not against me the sins of my youth, nor my former transgressions;" and to renew the deep confession of our text over every year

of childhood, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me."

So, also, in the evening of life, when the shadows of the grave may be falling around us, "even to old age," he tells us, "I am He, and even to hoar hairs I will carry you." The presence of God is around the aged sinner, who has grown old in rebellion, and sealed his heart against the power of the Gospel. Soon, very soon, he will awake from his dream of worldliness, and learn the reality of the solemn presence which he has forgotten and despised. But the aged believer, as he draws near to his home, finds the same truth to be his comfort and joy. He delights to remember that the same God, who has preserved him graciously through all his past years, and has promised to be his portion for ever, is with him from hour to hour,—that those daily thoughts of infinite mercy are resting on his soul. He rejoices in Him as an ever-present and Almighty Friend, who will soon reveal all His secret love, and bestow on him the fulness of joy in His own presence for ever.

The truth applies, with no less power, to all times of temptation and sorrow. When the Christian walks in darkness, and has no light, still he may comfort and sustain his soul by the presence of God. Such was the comfort of David in his affliction. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." The same promise is repeated by another prophet, and applied to every variety of sorrow. "When

thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." God is with his people in the wilderness, and with his children in the furnace; and in the darkest hours of trouble and sorrow, He who is light and love is continually by their side. His frown can turn the light itself into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness; but his gracious presence turns even the darkest hour of temptation into sunshine and joy. This truth should be in the heart of the Christian in every season of doubt and fear; and hope and confidence will revive, as he echoes the voice of the Psalmist—"O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me."

And surely in times of peace and joy this truth is not less precious to the soul. You who are surrounded with comforts, and still forget the God of your mercies, O remember that He searches and knows you. He notes down in his book of remembrance every ungrateful receiver of his bounty. "Were there not ten cleansed"—are his solemn words—"but where are the nine?" If you are daily loaded with benefits, and still there is no song of praise, no spark of love, no voice of thanksgiving, is it not a fearful thought that the eye of God is ever upon you, and his holy presence constantly by your side? As the sunshine turns the ripest fruits to rottenness, that presence which you despise will turn your abused mercies into a

treasure of fearful wrath in the day of judgment.

But if you have learned to praise the Lord of heaven for his goodness, how delightful the thought, in every hour of peace and comfort, that He does indeed search you and know you ! This will be the joy of your joys, the crown of all your happiness. Each outward gift will become tenfold more precious, when you feel that God himself, as your ever-present Friend, has commanded the blessing upon you. He is searching you, with holy wisdom, to choose the fittest mercies to bestow, and the fittest season in which to bestow them ; and in sunshine as in sorrow, his people will find joy and gladness in the memory of his gracious presence.

The truth applies, further, to all places. Wherever we are, and whatever we do, the heart-searching God is with us. " Whither shall I go from thy presence, or whither shall I flee from thy Spirit ? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

In the fields, in your daily labours, God is with you. He has formed the blue heavens which are around you, and the earth on which you tread. The flowers of the field—it is He who clothes them with beauty ; and all the green things of the earth praise the Lord, for they rise at his bidding alone for the use of

man. Every thing on which you look should remind you of that holy presence. He has created the light by which you see them, and he has formed the eyes which enable you to behold them. The earth is the Lord's, and its fulness; and you cannot labour in your daily tasks, without perpetual signs that his almighty hand is over you, and his eye of holiness fixed on all your ways.

At home, in the cottage of the poor, or the mansion of the rich and affluent, God is with you. "Every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God." The eye of this great builder pierces into the secrets of every dwelling. Your thoughts, your words, your actions, by the social hearth or in secret retirement, are known unto Him. Where two or three meet in his name, the Lord himself is in the midst of them; and when you enter into your closet, and your door is shut, your heavenly Father, who seeth in secret, is present still; and your secret prayers shall be rewarded openly. O how vast and overwhelming is the truth, that the eye of God is resting this moment on every dwelling, in all the kingdoms of the earth, and that every word and thought which is passing there is registered in his book of remembrance against the judgment-day!

And still more deeply should this truth be felt by us in the house of God. There He is specially present, by his holiness, to avenge the profane, and in his grace, to bless and comfort his people. To these assemblies of his ser-

vants on earth the words of the patriarch really belong: "Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Here the sense of God's presence should indeed rest on us with a double power. When we approach it, we should keep our foot with reverence, for we are entering into the more immediate presence of the King of kings. Every vain and unholy thought should there be felt as a more heinous sin, an insult on the holy presence of Him who searcheth the hearts, and seeketh for those who worship in spirit and in truth. How deep, how holy, how solemn, should be the feeling with which we tread his courts! And though every place is hallowed to the Christian, and his heart itself is to be the temple of the Holy Ghost, it is only in habitual reverence for the visible house of God's worship, and faith in his peculiar presence there revealed, that the inward worship of spirit and truth can be really maintained. Blessed, most blessed, are they who, in every hour of public worship, can feel the truth of this text written with a sunbeam on their hearts, and exclaim, while adoring at the footstool of Divine grace—"O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me."

But this doctrine must also be viewed in connection with our sins and our duties. It gives a foul aggravation to every act of sin, that it is indulged under the eye of the ever-present God. "Against thee, thee only, have

I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Think, my brethren, of all the countless offences of your past life—thoughts and words and deeds, by which your conscience has been defiled, and your soul brought into bondage, the grievous load of rebellion and corruption; and then remember that God, the living God has been present in all these. Every idle word has entered into His ears. Every vain thought, a mere whisper in the soul, is plain and open to him, as if it were proclaimed on the housetop with the voice of a trumpet. How solemn and affecting is the thought, in one single congregation of worshippers, what sins are thus open to the eye of God, clearly exposed to his view, and treasured in his remembrance! Did we feel this as we ought, how deep would be our joint confession at the opening of every service! How earnest would be our entreaties for pardon! How deep would be our humility and abasement! How lively would be our gratitude to him who permits such guilty sinners to enter into his presence, and to tread his courts, and to mingle their worship on earth with the cry of the cherubim and the seraphim above! The sins of the heart, and the sins of the tongue; our hypocrisy and deceit, our covetousness and sensuality, our murmuring and our unbelief, sins against God and sins against our neighbour—all alike are under the eye of God; and as we retrace the dark and fearful record of our transgressions, we may repeat the confession at every line, "O Lord, thou hast searched me,"

even in the depth of my sin, thou hast marked "and known me" in every hour of rebellion and ungodliness.

But this great doctrine applies equally to all the duties of the Christian, and to every act of obedience or holy worship. In these also the presence of God is ever with him. No work of faith or labour of love is overlooked or forgotten. There is One ever by our side who notes them all in his book of remembrance. Nathanael thought himself alone, but our Lord says to him—"Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." He gives us the command, and the gracious promise, "Pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." When St. Paul made mention of the Roman Christians in his prayers, then God was his witness. No tear of the contrite, no sigh of the mourner, no intercession of the humble believer, can escape the notice of His ever-present eye. He searches and knows the inmost desires of the soul, and understands the prayers and praises of His people, even before they find an utterance. This is the truth which should hallow all our worship, and impress on it a deeper and holier tone of reverence. Our private prayers, our public worship, all is under the eye of our Maker. Every moment his ear is open to receive the prayer of faith, and his gracious hand is ever near us to bestow an answer of blessing. He is present with us, to note all the defects of our services, that he

may pardon them ; and their sincerity, that he may approve them ; and their weakness, that he may strengthen and confirm them by his almighty grace. And most of all, when we present ourselves in his house, and join with his people in fervent prayer or in songs of thanksgiving, the words apply to every devout and to every careless worshipper, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me."

The same truth may be viewed, further, in its connection with the various attributes and perfections of God. Who is it that searcheth and knoweth us ? What is the nature of this wonderful presence that is always with us, though unseen and forgotten ? It is the presence of One who is almighty. Infinite Power is near to us and around us every moment. He spake, and the worlds were made, and suns and stars woke into being. He commanded, and the frame of nature stood fast, and his ordinances never fail. He has power to command the planets in their circuits, and to controul every creature to his will. All nations before him are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance, and he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. He has power over the spirits of men, and is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. He has power to raise the dead, to animate the sleeping dust, and to awaken myriads who now slumber in death unto immortal life and beauty. With Him nothing is impossible ; He can do all things, and no thought is withholden from him.

It is this Almighty God who is present with us unseen. How wonderful the thought, did we truly believe it ! How would it banish all fear of man, and fill us with a holy reverence for our Maker ! How would it lead us to watch against all sin, which provokes the power of Almighty God, who is always present, to arm itself against us ! A true faith in this one doctrine would change the whole current of our thoughts, and mould our lives into a heavenly spirit. The careless sinner would be aroused from his slumber, and a holy zeal and boldness would be poured into the heart of the Christian, like that of saints and prophets in the days of old.

He whose searching presence is with us, is infinite in wisdom. In this world we are surrounded by doubts and perplexing changes. We are infants, and know not how to guide ourselves aright. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." But this truth supplies a full remedy for all our doubts, and reveals an all-sufficient guide who is ever near to us. One whose wisdom is infinite and unsearchable is continually around us, and ready to hear when we call upon Him. Time after time he repeats to us the gracious promise, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye." The Christian, then, in every hour of doubt and darkness, may use this verse for his consolation. 'I am blind,' he will say, 'and ignorant. I cannot see clearly my own path. Out of

many courses that lie open to me, I cannot tell which will lead to true happiness, and best promote either my present or my eternal welfare. There are snares which I cannot see, and temptations which I have no power to avoid. But there is One who knows all these things, and is able and willing to deliver me. He sees every unknown danger, knows every future result, and can trace out the path of His children with unerring wisdom. His eye, ever present and wakeful, stands at the parting of all the various pathways of life, and to those who trust in him the promise will be fulfilled, the meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek He will teach his way.'

The presence which is around us daily, is not only the presence of infinite wisdom, but of perfect holiness. The God who searcheth us and knoweth us, is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity. This thought is deeply solemn and affecting. When Moses saw the vision at the bush, he wondered, and said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush burneth with fire and is not consumed." But there is a vision still more wonderful, which the eye of faith sees ever around us. The holy presence of that God, who is a consuming fire, is resting daily upon sinful creatures, and encompasses them hourly with its brightness, and yet they are not consumed. Infinite long suffering and grace holds back and restrains the natural effect of infinite holiness. The fire is there, a consuming fire of

righteous anger against sin, of spotless and burning holiness. The fuel is there, even dry trees ready for the burning, sinners full of ungodliness, and ripening for judgment. But the bush is not consumed, the sinners are not destroyed ; though the eyes of God, which are a flame of fire, are resting upon them, and that presence which is a consuming fire, encloses them on every side. Mercy holds back the full effects of the Divine holiness, until the Lord shall be revealed in flaming fire, in the day of his judgment. But still the presence is here, and the holiness of God is daily around the sinner. And thus faith discovers to us a sight more wonderful than the vision to Moses, in every day of renewed forbearance to this sinful world. O that we might all discover it, ere the day of grace be passed, and might learn the holiness of that God, whose truth is on every side, and whose searching presence is daily around the camp of his enemies and the footsteps of his people !

He who searcheth and knoweth us is also infinite in love. This is the most delightful view of the great doctrine here revealed to us. Yes, in a world of sin and sorrow, infinite love is always near to us, watching over all the people of God. Love is with his children when they rise, and love watches over them when they retire to rest. In their perplexities and fears, the God of love is still at their side ; and in their hours of peace and comfort, the God of all grace is with them, to heighten their

earthly pleasures into a heavenly joy, and give them the bright foretastes of His own presence in glory. It is this thought, the love of the ever-present God, which woke that reflection from the lips of the Psalmist—"How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand!" O how blessed the memory of this truth must be to the Christian. "Thoughts more numerous than the sands of the sea, or the stars of heaven, are daily resting on me, and they are thoughts of love. Plans of mercy are laid concerning me, and the God of love is daily present to fulfil them. Depths of mercy, untold, and unspeakable, are in store for me hereafter, and there is One present with me now, who purposes to fulfil them. He hath given commandment to bless, yea, and He hath blessed, and none can reverse it." Here is a truth which grows brighter and brighter to the view of the believer, the longer he continues to gaze upon it, till his soul is lost in devout adoration, and he exclaims with the great Apostle—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

But this leads to a further view of the doctrine taught in the words of the Psalmist, as it applies to the person of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. For "no man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath revealed

Him." And thus every lesson of the Divine goodness revealed in the Old Testament, is unfolded to us in a new light, and with added beauty, when we see it reflected in the person of Emmanuel, God with us. Our Lord applies the very words to himself in his message to Thyatira—"All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and the hearts."

Viewed in this light, what a rich and holy field of thought do the words offer to us! "O Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, thou hast searched me and known me." He who for our sakes came down from heaven, and laid aside his eternal glory to redeem us, is present with us hourly, to mark the fruits of his own love, and the answer we make to his infinite goodness. He who for our sakes stooped from the throne of heaven to the lowly manger, is present to detect every thought of pride, to gaze upon it with his eyes of fire, and meet it with the frown of his displeasure. He who washed the feet of his disciples, when he was himself about to return to the Father, and to sit on the throne of the universe, notes every act of kindness, every thought of humility, every faint attempt to copy his example, and tread in his footsteps, in the least and meanest of his people. The Man of Sorrows is searching and knowing all the children of sorrow in their hours of darkness, to comfort them with his grace. He who wept at the grave of Lazarus is counting the tears of his people, and treasures them in his book of remembrance. He

who received sinners, and ate with them, is present still with every returning prodigal, to note the first yearning of his penitent heart after a despised and forgotten Saviour. He who will shortly appear as the Judge of all men, the King of kings, is now present unseen, with the sinner in his rebellion, and with the saint in his retirement, with the drunkard and the profane in their ungodly revels, and with the children of light in their hours of secret prayer and solitary praise. His parting words every hour receive a fresh fulfilment, "Lo, I am with you always till the end of the world." And they will never cease to be fulfilled, in every family, and tribe, and region of the earth, till the trumpet of God shall sound, and summon the living and the dead into the light of his revealed presence, there to give in their account before the righteous Judge.

How solemn a thought is this to the unbelieving and the worldly! That Saviour whom you despise and reject is near you continually. He marks your disobedience to his commands, the daily slight which you put upon his love, and your rejection of his dying grace. Now he forbears with much long-suffering. But if you persevere in your neglect of his mercy, he will soon take up against you that fearful message, "Because I called, and ye refused, I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye made a mock of my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh."

How joyful and blessed is the same thought to the true followers of Christ ! It is true that eighteen centuries have passed since the Lord of glory tabernacled here below, and your eyes have never seen him—he is passed into the heavens. But “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” He is near you still, he is searching you and knoweth you. Your secret thoughts, your silent prayers, are open to his view. A love, so deep that your thoughts cannot measure it, is hourly around you. A Presence so glorious in the mystery it contains, that angels desire to look into it—the presence of Emmanuel, God incarnate, is compassing your steps, and dwells in the most hidden chambers of your soul, to trace your thoughts, and prevent your desires with answers of mercy. Before you call, he is ready to answer, and while you are still speaking, the holy and blessed Saviour is present to hear your cry. Here is your stay in trouble, your guide in darkness, and your hope in death. In every scene of life, and in the conflict with the last enemy, you may stay your soul on this verse, and read it in the light of the gospel as a most glorious promise, saying ever in your heart, “O Lord Jesus Christ, thou art ever with me. O Son of David, the friend of sinners, thou hast searched me and known me.” “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

The same truth applies, further, to the per-

son of the Holy Ghost, the promised Comforter of the Church. Of Him it is written : " The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, even the deep things of God." This blessed Spirit is continually with us, in his various offices of love and holiness. He is present with sinners, to strive with their rebellious hearts, which, like the unbelieving Jews, do " always resist the Holy Ghost." He searches his people in every hour of backsliding and folly, when they grieve his holiness, and thus provoke that blessed Spirit, by whom they are sealed to the day of redemption. He is present in their secret prayers, and helpeth their infirmities. Nay, because they cannot pray as they ought, he searches their hearts when they pray, discovers the secret meaning and depth of those desires which he has awakened, and which they cannot understand for themselves ; and then himself " maketh intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered." He searches their griefs in every hour of sorrow, detects the secret sting of anguish that festers in their bosom ; and himself, as the blessed Comforter, first extracts the poisoned arrow of sin that rankles in their conscience, and then pours in the healing balm of his heavenly consolations. " The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." To this Lord, even the blessed Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, and the Intercessor of God's believing people, the words of the Psalmist apply, as a message of comfort to the Church. " O Lord, the Holy Ghost, thou hast searched

me, and known me." How blessed the thought to a true believer ! Infinite holiness is dwelling within, to cleanse away his most secret corruptions, to discover every way of wickedness, and remove it, and to lead his ransomed soul in the way everlasting !

Let us seek, then, to enter more deeply into this glorious doctrine,—the searching presence of our God. Day after day, let it sink into our hearts with a mightier power, to humble, to cleanse, and to quicken them. Let this one thought prepare the way for every other message of God's word, and for every other truth of the everlasting gospel. Let us hear them as the word of that God, who is watching over us, and searching us daily. Thus shall we grow continually in knowledge and in grace, and be preparing for that blessed state, where the veil of sense shall be torn away from our eyes, and the promise be fulfilled to all the children of God—"They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads."

SERMON II.

PSALM CXXXIX. 1.

O LORD, THOU HAST SEARCHED ME, AND KNOWN ME.

FROM these words we have already considered the great doctrine itself which they reveal—the ceaseless and searching presence of God. He is with us at all times, and in all places; present in his holiness, to discover and punish all sin; present in his power and love, to bless, and comfort, and reward his people. Let us now consider the practical lessons that flow from this solemn truth. The Spirit of God himself, by the Psalmist, sets them before us, and shews, through the remainder of the Psalm, how deep and full is the influence of the doctrine, wherever it is truly believed.

The first lesson which these words naturally convey, is the duty of *a deep and solemn reverence for God*. This was the effect of the truth on the mind of the Psalmist. As if oppressed by the greatness and majesty of the presence of God, he exclaims at once, “Such knowledge is

too wonderful for me ; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

Such, my brethren, ought to be the first effect of this truth upon ourselves. The light and vain spirit of the world easily creeps over us. Then our services become lifeless forms, and our prayers empty mockeries. Then the doctrines of the gospel become playthings for the memory or the understanding, and cease to affect the heart. Religion sinks into a mere pretence ; its words may be on our lips, but its truths oppress us no longer with a sense of their unutterable greatness. The recoil is easy, from a form of sound words, held in this light and trifling spirit, into open unbelief, or the darkest delusions of a superstitious reverence.

The true cure for these evils is to be found only in a deep and abiding reverence for the heart-searching and ever-present God. This restores religion to its real character. It is no longer the vain jangling of words, but an habitual walking of the soul with its Maker. Such was the life of Enoch : "he walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." And never will religion appear before the world in its true light, until the Christian shall copy this high example, and reverence for God's holy presence shall govern all our thoughts, and mould our minds, with a ceaseless power, to holiness and obedience.

How can we think of this presence of God, which is always around us, and not feel a deep emotion of awe and wonder ? We are dust and

ashes, and the God before whom the seraphim veil their faces is present with us. We are sinful and vile, and He who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, is gazing upon the secrets of our hearts. We live in a world of wonders, where ten thousand objects solicit and distract our thoughts, and the God who has made all these things is ever at our side; his boundless power and wisdom are always around us. How deep is the reverence which this truth should awaken in our souls! The world, which before might seem empty and dreary, now becomes one glorious temple to the majesty of the Most High. Wherever we are, we may say with the patriarch, "Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not! How dreadful is this place!" In the lonely walk, in the secret chamber, there is the continual presence of the King of kings. In every hour of folly, there is the still small voice of his holiness speaking in our ears, and saying, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their doings." "I know the things that come into your minds, every one of them." Well might the seraphim, in the view of this one truth, veil their faces with their wings, and exclaim, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."

Let us seek, then, to share in this worship of the heavenly company, this devout adoration of the holy Psalmist. The knowledge of this truth is too wonderful for our minds to fathom it; let our hearts, at least, be melted and softened by

its power. Let the follies of the world be banished by the sentence of Hagar—"Thou, God, seest me." Let the fear of man be driven away by the fear of God; a God ever nigh to punish his enemies and to bless his servants. Let the dulness of formal worship be broken up and destroyed by this one reflection—The God whom angels and archangels worship in glory, is present with me now, and, in his amazing condescension, hearkens to my prayers. Thus will the soul be attuned to a holy and devout temper, in which every truth of God's word will find an easy entrance, and every plant of righteousness will grow and flourish. Sin will be more hateful, when we see that it is rebellion under the very eye and presence of the Great King. The Saviour will be more precious, when we reflect on his own words, "Lo, I am with you always;" and think of the deep love in that heart which is ever near us, to save the lost, and to quicken the souls of his people. And thus, in habitual reverence, we shall take up the words of David, and repeat them with a deeper sense of their meaning—"O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!"

A further lesson which these words should teach us is that of deep confession and abasement before God. Such was the effect upon the holy patriarch Job, when he saw the vision of God's presence. Before, the truth had been seen dimly, and at a distance; now it flashed upon his soul in its full and overwhelming power. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,

but now mine eye seeth thee ; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

The same deep abasement, my Christian brethren, must be produced in our minds, when this doctrine finds a real entrance. For let us reflect on it for one moment, and what does it imply ? All our sins lie naked in the presence of infinite holiness. Every secret corruption, and every open transgression—all that we have veiled from the eyes of others, and all that is known to a few only—is present to his view. He was there when every sin was committed, and its loathsomeness and deformity is unmasked before him. How terrible would be such a thought, without a Mediator and an Advocate, an atonement and a ransom ! What a power it reveals in those words, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered !” Yes, there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves. “Hell and destruction are before the Lord, how much more the hearts of the children of men !” “Can any hide him in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord ?”

Ever since the fall, the sons of Adam, like their father, have sought to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God. The trees of the garden, the chambers of wantonness, and the haunts of violence, have been used in turn, to screen them, if possible, from the eyes of their Maker. But the attempt is as vain as wicked ; the Lord searches and knows them still. His

voice can reach them in the thickest bower of the garden, and his handwriting goes forth against the ungodly even in their halls of revelry and riot. "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down; and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search them, and take them out from thence." Everywhere His holy eyes are present to detect sin; everywhere His face and anger is against the sinner. "Even the heavens are not pure in his sight; how much more abominable and filthy is man, who drinketh up iniquity like water!"

Surely this thought should humble and abase us before God. How monstrous is pride in those who have been sinning day after day, and year after year, under the eyes of a God of holiness! What cause have we all to copy the holy patriarch; and when the thought of this truth reveals to us the vision of the present God, to repent in dust and ashes at his footstool! If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of the Lord. The more freely and humbly we unbosom our souls before him, the more deeply we mourn our own secret sins and multiplied rebellions, the fuller and more gracious will be the voice of mercy to our souls. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

And this abasement, if deep and real, will ever be joined with a true repentance, and a

heartily forsaking of the sins we deplore. Darkness cannot endure the presence of light, and habits of sin cannot endure the remembered presence of a God of holiness. The light of His holy countenance, when it shines on the soul, will drive away its corruptions, and suffer them to lodge in it no longer. The heart will then reply, like Joseph, to every tempter, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Sorrow and shame for the past will be joined with a steadfast purpose of soul, to live henceforth as under the eye of God; to walk so as to please him, and to abound herein more and more. Under the power of this quickening and humbling truth, the chambers of imagery, once full of hateful and foul abominations, will be changed into treasuries of grace, the favoured resort and dwelling-place of the King of heaven.

Search, then, your hearts, my brethren, as Hezekiah did the temple; bring forth all the secret idols, and break them in pieces *before the Lord*. Reflect on your past sins, and as you call each one to mind, remember that God was present, and beheld it. You have done this evil in his sight who cannot endure iniquity. Lament it then with a deeper sorrow; and forsake it with a more sincere and hearty abhorrence. You have been unbelievers under the very light of his eternal Majesty whose words you have slighted; and you have been proud in the presence of the Holy One, whose justice would long ago have consumed you, had not his mercies

been great, and his forbearance infinite. He speaks hourly, and in secret whispers of conscience, to the hardened sinner, "Fear ye not me, saith the Lord; and will ye not tremble at my presence?" May we thus learn to tremble at his word; and while we think of that searching presence which surrounds us, may we confess our sins with tears of sorrow, and turn with weeping and mourning unto the Lord our God!

Another duty to which these words of the Psalmist should invite us, is that of devout praise and thanksgiving. Thus David expresses his own feelings: "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well."

Once indeed let us remember how near God is to us at all times, and every event is seen in a new light. Every daily gift of his Providence becomes more mysterious and wonderful. We receive it now as coming immediately from his hand. It is this ever-present God, as the Psalmist dwells on the thought, who has framed and fashioned us from our very birth. Our bodies and our souls, made so fearfully and wonderfully, are all his secret workmanship. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." He is the God "in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways." What a field does this one thought open to us, for praise and thanksgiving! Our best and wisest Friend is continually by our sides. Our bountiful and gracious Benefactor, the Giver of every good gift, is near us, though unseen, embracing our souls with his perpetual

goodness. Day after day we are pensioners on his free bounty. Our bodies, with their various powers, where human science is lost in wonder—these are the gift of his love. His hands have made and fashioned us ; and the Maker who has framed us in such fearful wisdom, is ever around us still. Even for this gift alone, how unceasing should be our tribute of praise ! But our souls are his gift also, and these are still more wonderful ; immortal, undying, and capable of knowing and loving the God who made them, and of enjoying his love for ever. And He is present with the souls he has made. Every hour His eye is on the most secret chambers of the heart ; and all our hidden springs of thought and action lie open before him. Surely, if this truth rested in our hearts, we could not help joining in the words of David, and echoing his holy resolution, when we review these gifts under the eye of the Giver—“ I will bless the Lord at all times ; his praise shall be continually in my mouth. O magnify the Lord with me ; and let us exalt his name together.”

Read in the light of this truth, every mercy becomes more wonderful, and makes a louder call on our thankfulness and praise. The blessings we enjoy are seen to flow directly from the good pleasure of God. The Saviour is with his people, and guides with his wise and gracious hand the stream of his own bounty, which he pours on their souls. The God of all long-suffering is watching over the sinner, and in the very moment of his rebellion, with an heart of

ever-present love overcomes evil with good, and bestows fresh gifts upon him. How wonderful the scene which thus opens every hour to the eye of faith, and how deep is the adoration and praise it must awaken to the God of all grace and love, who is present to observe every sin, and still continues to crown miserable sinners with mercy and loving-kindness. One lively glimpse of this truth would shame us out of our coldness, and stir up our souls to continual songs of praise.

But this truth of God's holy presence should lead us also, like the Psalmist, to a further duty—habits of close and daily communion. Such is the meaning of those words in the Psalm, which reveal the secret language of David's own heart—"How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with thee." The truth did not lie idle in his understanding; it quickened and comforted his heart, and roused him to the blessed habit of intercourse with his Maker. And thus the beloved disciple, who leaned on the bosom of Jesus, speaks of this as the highest form and privilege of true religion, the crowning purpose of God's word—"These things write we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

This is indeed the first duty of the sinner,

and the highest privilege of the true believer. It is revealed by the prophet Micah as the sum of our duty. "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to humble thyself to walk with God." This was the holy experience of Enoch, the earnest of his translation to glory; this the practice of Abraham, which rendered him the father and example of believers.

Let us consider what this duty implies, and the blessings which it ensures to the soul. The God of all love and wisdom and holiness, is ever near to us, and his eye is resting on us daily. Our souls are weak, sinful, and helpless, in a world of temptation and death, and fast hastening to the judgment-seat of Christ. Communion with God is the one great means of preparing them for that judgment, and for the glorious kingdom of heaven. We have only to lift up our eyes, and we may see His presence; we have only to open our ears, and we shall hear the voice of His love. How precious then should his thoughts be to us. Every day and every hour, this God of love is meditating on our wants, our sins, our duties, and our desires. Every moment His ear is open to receive our cry, and listens to the language of our heart. What a glorious fellowship is here open, how precious, and how wonderful too! How should we unbosom our wants, and reveal to him our inmost thoughts, presenting them like the pure shew-bread, daily before him. The presence of an earthly friend is delightful. The intercourse

of Christians with each other has a deep joy which the world cannot understand. They have sympathies of hope and fear, of love and desire, which delight to unfold themselves in the utterances of friendship. But here is a communion far higher. Here a love that is boundless, soliciting us to dwell upon it with a holy gladness. Here infinite Wisdom calls us to search into his own thoughts of mercy, and his own plans of grace to us, which are from everlasting. The least event of life is now lit up with the glory of heaven. It is the fruit of His wisdom who counts the steps of his people and numbers the hairs of their head, "to humble them and to prove them, to do them good at their latter end." Nothing, however trivial, escapes His notice; it is one of those countless links in his thoughts of mercy, which are working together for good to them that love him. Well might the Psalmist exclaim, with a deep and holy joy, in the experience of this communion with God: "How precious are thy thoughts to me, how great is the sum of them!" Every separate thought of God was precious; for there is the condescension of infinite grace written upon it, caring for a guilty creature, a helpless and feeble child. And the number of those thoughts, each so precious, is boundless and unsearchable. Our food, our clothing, our home and its comforts, our bodies with their various members, sustained by his hands, our souls with their hidden powers; every thought in our hearts, every word in our lips; our prayers, our praises, our sins, our

mercies—all are the subject of these continual thoughts of our God, like so many golden links to draw our souls into communion with Him. When we awake, we are with him still. The thread of our own thoughts may have been broken in those hours of slumbers ; but His thoughts of love, with unresting and watchful tenderness, have been around us still. They greet us earlier than the song of the bird, or the light of morning. O surely if the sinner knew the true nature of the privilege that is within his reach, he could not despise it. Like the Apostle, he would “count all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord ;” that ever present and gracious Saviour, in whom this doctrine appears in its tenderest and nearest form ; for his name is Emmanuel, God with us. How should the believer rejoice in the thought that such intercourse is always open to him, and how perpetually should he unbosom the thoughts of his heart, from hour to hour, in the presence of his God and Saviour !

A further duty taught us by this doctrine, is the stedfast avoidance of all sin. Such was David’s resolution—“ Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God ! depart from me, therefore, ye bloody men. Do not I hate them that hate thee ; and am not I displeased with them that rise up against thee ? ”

When we forget the presence of God, sin becomes a mere abstraction ; we can renounce it in words, and still cherish it in our hearts. But when we feel that the living God is really

with us, who hates and abhors sin, and grieves over it, then it will appear to us in a different light. Friends, who dwell together in love, acquire each other's tastes, and adopt each other's friendships: so will it be with the soul that abides in God's presence. What God abhors, it will abhor, and what God delights in will be its pleasure. Sin will be seen as a grief to our best Friend, a contempt of the advice of our wisest Counsellor, as a base return to our kind Benefactor, and an affront rendered to our King and Judge under the eye of his infinite holiness. Hence we shall learn to hate it and abhor it, to flee from it as a serpent, and never to be content while any secret corruption lodges within us. And thus David, while he learned to hate ungodliness in others, hated it in himself, and prays to God to discover every wicked way in his own heart, and utterly remove it—"See if there be any wicked way in me. Take from me the way of lying. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way." Such too, my brethren, will be the effect of God's presence on ourselves, when we truly believe it. We shall hate the sins of others, but still more shall we hate our own; and cry out, with St. Paul, in deep and earnest desire—"Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And thus, as Samuel "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord," so will the soul that dwells in the presence of God hew every idol in pieces, and destroy, as under his immediate eye, every corruption that once reigned within his heart.

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Finally, the last duty to which these words invite us, when explained by the example of the Psalmist, is that of continual and fervent prayer. With such earnest prayer the Psalm closes. The Holy Spirit seems hereby to impress this duty on the church, as the final lesson to be drawn from the all-searching presence of God. And how naturally does this duty flow from the great truth set before us. Our souls are like empty vessels, needy and helpless ; and within their reach, every day and every hour, there is a full and everlasting fountain. What should we do but come to that fountain incessantly for a large supply. Our wants are great, but the God of all grace is ever near us ; the "Lord over all, who is rich unto all that call upon him," is standing at the door of our hearts. We have only to open to him by earnest prayer, and He will enter in, and visit us with his grace. We have only to ask, and before we call, He has promised to answer. We have only to seek his grace, and behold, his ear is ready to listen, his hand of love is near to us, and open to supply our need. We have not, only because we ask not. Heaven itself is within our reach, for that God, who fills heaven itself with all its glory and blessedness, is with us daily. We are not straitened in His unwillingness to give, but only in our sluggishness to ask, and our backwardness to receive. Surely if we knew and felt how near He is to us, how boundless in love, how rich in all the variety of goodness, we could not cease to pray to him. Prayer would be the instinct of our hearts, the irrepressible utterance of want

under the eye of infinite fulness, of weakness in the presence of almighty power, and sin and guilt under the streams of atoning mercy and all-sufficient grace. We should pray for the searching presence of God, that it might fill and possess every chamber of our soul. We should long that those eyes like a flame of fire, which ever gaze on us, might consume away all the dross of our souls. We should apply hourly to this Captain of salvation, who is infinite in wisdom, that he would deliver us from every false way, and himself would lead our footsteps in the way everlasting. How can the thirsty land choose but to drink in the showers when they fall on it from heaven? And how can the needy soul of the fallen sinner choose but to pray fervently to the God of all grace, when once it begins to remember and believe his holy presence?

Let us seek, then, to apply these words of the Psalmist to our own hearts, in their quickening power. May they lead us to holy reverence and deep humility before God. May they fill us with thankfulness and praise, and awaken in our souls the desire for continual communion with our Maker. From this truth may we gain strength to resist sin, and fresh earnestness of prayer and supplication. Then will the memory of God's presence on earth be a spring of living waters to the soul, and we shall daily be ripening for His presence in heaven, where alone there is fulness of joy, and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore!

SERMON III.

GALATIANS II. 20.

THE LIFE WHICH I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH, I LIVE BY
THE FAITH OF THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME AND
GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME.

WE have already considered, from the words of the Psalmist, that faith in the living God and his ceaseless presence, which lies at the root of all true godliness. But this truth needs to be viewed still more closely, in its connexion with the doctrines of the gospel, and the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian is not content to dwell in the presence of God, as the God of nature and providence only. He beholds him revealed in the Son of his love, and delights to connect every lesson of the Old Testament with the gracious message of the new covenant. He does not rest merely in the words of David ; but while he feels the searching presence of the Lord his God, he reads the doctrine in the light which beams from the cross ; and thus endeavours to rise into the blessed experience of the Apostle

—"The life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." May the Holy Spirit assist us first to understand these words, and then to practise them, while we consider the Great Object of Christian faith, the truths on which it more especially dwells, and then the personal application of those truths to our own souls.

I. The great object of Christian faith is the person of the Son of God. All the doctrines and the hopes of the gospel centre in him. We have not to deal with an abstract Deity. Our faith must rest on "the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." The doctrine of God's continual presence itself assumes a new light to the Christian; it is the presence of the incarnate, and dying, and risen Saviour. This is the faith which cheers and sustains him, and moulds his soul into the Divine image. Let us view this faith, first, in its general objects—the Divine person, the life and ministry, the ascension and continual intercession, and the future coming and kingdom, of the Son of God.

The faith of the Christian has respect, first of all, to the Divine person of the Saviour. The title itself here used—The Son of God, implies the true Godhead of the Lord Jesus. He was the Son of God before he came into the world, and was manifested anew in the resurrection. He is the only begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father. He came forth from the Father, and came into the world, before he left the world, and returned to the

Father again. Herein is the glory of the Divine goodness. It was his Son, his only and well-beloved Son, by whom also he made the worlds, whom the Father gave up freely for our salvation. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave *his Son* to be the propitiation for our sins." "We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

This divine glory of the Saviour is the cornerstone of Christian faith. It is the wonderful bridge which unites the Creator with the creature, and eternity with time. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath revealed him." It is a thought that would crush and confound us by its greatness, if we were not familiar with the sound of it, and blind to its real power. He by whom heaven and earth were made has been incarnate in our nature. He whom the hosts of angels serve and obey, was wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger. The everlasting Son of God, begotten before every creature, and by whom all things were made, has trod upon this earth, has groaned in agony in the garden, and been nailed to the accursed tree. This is a truth which angels desire to look into, and archangels are confounded by its greatness. When once a glimpse of its divine power strikes upon the soul, the sleep of sin is broken, and every faculty wakes into won-

der and adoration. How vast is that love which stooped for our sakes from such an immeasurable height of glory to such a depth of shame ! How fearful the evil of sin, which needed that the everlasting Son of the Father should become a sacrifice to atone for its guilt ! How unspeakable the worth of those immortal souls, for which the Maker of all worlds was content to become incarnate, and to die in bitter agony ! How vast and unutterable the glory of that salvation which has been purchased by a price so costly ! For “ He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things.”

The true Christian, then, lives by faith in the Son of God, in the glory of his divine person. He is not content with the barren and heartless profession of an orthodox creed. He seeks to feel the power of this “ mystery of godliness.” When he looks on the stars of heaven, he remembers—The framer of those countless worlds was incarnate for my redemption. When he traces the discoveries of science, he calls to mind the solemn truth—The Lord of nature, who has fixed all her secret laws, and whose works are ever around me, for my sins was nailed to the cross, and exposed to open shame before ungodly sinners. Every work of nature, and every event of providence, becomes thus a fresh inlet for the doctrines of grace, and applies them with a deeper power and solemnity to the heart. “ How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which first began to be spoken to us

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by the Lord ? ”—by the Lord of men and angels, of earth and of heaven. Without controversy, great and wonderful is this mystery of godliness. This one title—the Son of God, reveals to the Christian an universe of wonders ; and gathers all nature and providence to increase the brightness of that love which shines forth in the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus.

But this faith in the Son of God refers, not only to his divine person, God of God, the Son of the Father, begotten before all worlds, the object of eternal adoration ; but also to his life and ministry here below. The Son of God has been manifested in the flesh. He has stooped from the height of his glory, that we might gaze on him more closely, and touch the hem of his blessed garments. For us men, and for our salvation, He has come down from heaven. And now our faith must lay hold on his incarnation, and the record of his life in the holy gospels, as our stay and confidence in trouble, and the means of a close communion and fellowship with our Incarnate Lord. “ The Word has been made flesh, and has tabernacled among us,” and now we may indeed behold his glory. He says to us, as to his disciples of old, “ Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself ; handle me and see.” And thus the faith of a Christian in the Son of God fixes mainly on the works and words of the Saviour, during his sojourn in mortal flesh, and in this lower world. We therein behold “ the glory of the Only-begotten, full of grace and of truth.”

What is it, then to live in this sense, by faith in the Son of God? It is to meditate daily on his works and words of love and holiness, from the cradle to the grave. It is to remember, when we read every verse of the holy gospels, He of whom these things are written is the everlasting Son of God; and these things he has done for my salvation. His miracles were wrought to shew us his divine power in opening the blind eyes and unstopping the deaf ears of the soul. His parables were spoken for our sake, to turn all nature around us into one message of love. His commands are given that we may obey them; his promises, that we may rely on them; his prophecies, that we may believe them; his labours of love are written for our learning, that we may tread in his footsteps, and thus become sharers in his kingdom. O how wide is the field of holy thought and willing obedience which faith in the Son of God, incarnate on earth, opens before the eye of the true Christian. It is a landscape of spiritual joy, more beautiful and blessed than that which Moses saw from the top of Pisgah; for the Lord Jesus, in his deep humility, his fervent love, his spotless holiness, and his unspeakable grace, is himself the inheritance of his true servants. In the holy gospels this good land lies open before us—"a land of hills and valleys, that drinketh water of the rain of heaven." Christ Jesus, in the majesty of his holiness, and the depth and tenderness of his grace is the object on whom our faith must rest. Every act

of the Saviour, from his birth till his ascension into glory, ought thus to be graven on the memory of his people; and while they meditate on the inspired record, like the Apostle himself, their life will be one of daily and growing faith in the incarnate Son of God.

But this faith has respect also to the Ascension of our Lord, and his continual intercession. His work did not cease when he ascended on high, nor does the eye of faith cease to follow him, now that he is entered within the veil. Nay, rather, its highest office is to follow him into the most holy place, and to gaze on the work of our great High Priest, now in the presence of God. The Son of Man, in our nature, is now seated on the throne of his Father. He who bore our sins on the cross is now surrounded by the worship of all the holy angels. He who was born at Bethlehem, is now ordering the courses of the stars and all the worlds of light, and wields the sceptre of the universe. But faith views him in an aspect of still deeper and dearer interest. He is there as our High Priest and our Forerunner. He ever liveth to make intercession for his people. He bears their names on the breast-plate of judgment before the Lord, and has engraven them on the palms of his hands. In every sin they commit, He pleads his sacrifice, that those sins may be pardoned. In every want of their soul, He pleads his own righteousness, that spiritual and temporal blessings may be showered upon them from above. O how glorious to the eye

of faith is this view of the risen Saviour—so highly exalted, yet so compassionate and tender-hearted—so infinite in glory, and yet so boundless in grace. This is the triumph of faith, to dwell daily and hourly under the brightness of that one truth. He is “able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” One glorious pattern of this priestly intercession he left as a parting legacy to his church, and that prayer, like the rod of Aaron, is now blossoming into all the beautiful variety of grace and love within the sanctuary of God. The prayers, the praises of the church, are acceptable to God, only through Christ Jesus. They are presented in his golden censer, and mingled with the incense of his merits, that they may rise ever with acceptance before the throne.

How dim and feeble is our faith in this great doctrine, the intercession of the Son of God ! We bury ourselves in the misty cares of the world, and do not rise into the light of that heavenly love, which is resting on us daily. The sunshine and the rain and the fruitful seasons, our bibles and our sabbaths, all are the fruit of this intercession of Christ within the veil. This truth meets us in every star and in every flower ; if this mighty Intercessor were not pleading above, the eyes of guilty rebels could never behold their beauty or their brightness. The earth may be ready to sink and be dissolved under its load of sin, but this divine Advocate bears up its pillars. Our hearts should rest on

this work of the Lord Jesus within the veil; and our life should be one continual act of faith on that Son of God who is now entered into the most holy place, as the true Melchizedec, and there makes constant intercession for his believing people.

This faith in the Son of God includes, further, the promise of his appearing and kingdom. He who died on the cross, and now reigns in heaven, will hereafter appear in his glory. He will return to build up Zion, to gather his saints into his presence, and to judge the quick and the dead. The kingdom that He will establish will stand for ever. There will then be new heavens and a new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell. A true faith in the Son of God will lead the soul to embrace these glorious hopes, in simplicity and love. It will lead us to dwell, with a deep and solemn joy, on the promises of his appearance. For "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The heart of the Judge will be the same as the heart of the Saviour, tender in its deepest holiness, and full of grace even in severest judgment.

How wide a field is open, here also, to the faith of the Christian! The Lord whom he serves and obeys will be revealed as the King of kings. Old things will pass away and all things will be made new. The mystery of God will be finished. Creatures will no longer be surrounded by the holy presence of their Maker, and no sign of his presence appear to them. The long silence of the Godhead will be broken

by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of the great day. In that glorious kingdom which shall then be revealed, the Son of God shall be enthroned as King, amidst the worship of saints, and of all the angels of God. Faith rests on the promise, and while it gazes on the face of nature, and the course of the world, says to the heart—‘All these shall be changed like a vesture—the fashion of this world is hasting away. Soon our eyes shall see the King of heaven in his beauty, and behold, without a cloud, the unveiled countenance of his Divine glory.’

Such was the faith of this great Apostle, and such also must be ours. He beheld, in the Lord Jesus, the everlasting Son of the Father, begotten before the world began. He dwelt on the wonders of the Incarnation, and adored with reverence the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. He traced the Son of God in all his words and works of mercy, while he sojourned here on earth. He kept in view, daily, the Intercession of this great High Priest, and saw Jesus “passed into the heavens,” and there living for ever to plead the cause of his people. And he looked forward, in faith and hope, to the return of the Saviour; when the Son of God, the first-begotten, shall come again into the world, and that charge shall be solemnly given by the heavenly Father—“Let all the angels of God worship him.”

II. But the faith of the Christian, while it has respect to the Son of God himself, and the whole of his work for our salvation, has some

truths on which it specially dwells. These are here described by the Apostle, in that weighty clause—"who loved me, and gave himself for me." The dying love and atoning sacrifice of Christ are the object, above all others, on which the faith of the true Christian must rest.

And here let us dwell first on the love itself which is here set before us—"who loved me." Blessed and wonderful truth—who can exhaust it? who can understand its Divine fulness? The same Apostle prays elsewhere for the Ephesians—that their eyes might be enlightened—that they might be "able to comprehend with all saints the height and length and breadth and depth, and know the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge." Let us dwell on a few aspects of this glorious truth, the anchor of our faith, and the substance of the everlasting gospel.

This love is an eternal love. Its fountain was in the heart of the Son of God before the worlds were made. There was never a time when this love first began; it is from everlasting. When angels were created, and this lower world was called into being; when Adam fell, and the world perished in the waters; through all the distant ages of mankind, this love was in the bosom of the Lord, a fountain of perpetual mercies to the children of God. He was rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, even before the mountains were brought forth, and his delights were with the sons of men. How glorious is the thought of this stream of Divine love, which has flowed on for thousands of ages,

and like the waters from the sanctuary, grows still wider and deeper as it flows, in the blessings it dispenses to the creatures of God !

This love is a love to all men. "The tender mercies of the Lord are over all his works." "He loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment." "He giveth food to all flesh, for his mercy endureth for ever." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son" to die for its redemption. He "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." To prove how sincere he is in his thoughts of mercy, he confirms them by a solemn oath : "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner ; but rather that he should be converted and live. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die ?" He who wept over Jerusalem is still the same, and the yearning of his heart over lost sinners is as deep as ever.

This love is a special and sovereign love toward his believing people. Christ "loved the Church, and gave himself for it." He takes pleasure in his people, and beautifies the meek with salvation. His intercession is specially for those who believe in his name, in contrast with the unbelieving world. His love to all men is deep, sincere, and holy ; but his love to his own servants is a love of delight and gladness. He rests in his love, and rejoices over them with singing. The one is the love of his goodwill, the other of his sovereign grace and good pleasure ; but both of them are deep, boundless, and unsearchable.

This love is a patient love. He bears with us from day to day. He suffers long and is kind, in the midst of all our perverseness. He tends our souls with much long-suffering, that he may make us partakers of his holiness. How often did his own disciples grieve him, and yet how tenderly did he reprove them, and how graciously did he restore them ! He is still the same as when on earth. Our vain thoughts, our idle words, our perverseness and rebellions, pass daily before his eyes ; yet he loves us still, and overcomes our evil with his own goodness. None can tell the depth of his forbearance to a world of sinners, till it is revealed in the light of his holiness in the judgment day.

This love is abiding and perpetual. It stoops to every want, and listens to every prayer. It rests on the sinner, with patient forbearance, in every hour of rebellion ; it visits the saint with holy comfort in every hour of sorrow. It counts the tears of the people of Christ, and numbers the hairs of their head, watches over their footsteps, and loves them to the end. It sustains the believer in the hour of death, places its everlasting arms beneath him, and lands him safely in the kingdom of God. Prophecies may fail, and tongues may cease, nations may fall, and empires may pass away ; but the love of Christ can never fail, his care can never cease, and the tenderness of his compassion to his people endures for ever.

But there is one proof of this love, here singled out above all others, for our faith to lean upon—

“ He gave himself for us.” The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross is the fullest pledge of his love to his people, and it is the truth on which their faith rests as its surest foundation. Who can fathom the meaning of these few words ! Neither man nor angel can search out their hidden depth and power. He who made heaven and earth, “ Immanuel, God with us ”—“ he who is God over all, blessed for ever,” was the wonderful Giver. And he gave Himself, with all his glory and greatness, to endure agony and shame ;—with all the merit of his person, to secure our pardon—with all his tender sympathy as man, to bear our sorrows—with all his divine grace, to be a treasury whence all our wants may be supplied. He *gave* himself, without compulsion or constraint, in the freeness of his love, and in the depth of his compassion to our souls. This was the language of his heart, “ Lo, I come to do thy will, O God ! I delight to do it ; yea, thy law is within my heart.” And how did he give himself ? In suffering and deep sorrow, in agony and bitter shame. He left the throne of heaven and its anthems of praise, to be the mockery of sinners and the song of the drunkard upon earth. He laid aside the sceptre of the universe, to be smitten with the reed in mockery, and crowned with thorns. Never before was there a gift so wonderful, and never can such an offering be repeated through all eternity. All evils are overcome, all blessings are ensured to the believer, by that one perfect sacrifice ; for, as the Apostle reasons—

“He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

But chiefly we are to view this gift in two lights. He gave himself as an atonement for all our sins; and he gave himself also, as a full and all-sufficient treasury of all grace. He is “the Lamb of God who hath taken away the sin of the world.” And “it hath pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell.” This gift includes every spiritual blessing. “He is made” to his people “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;” and from him the whole body of the Church, receiving divine nourishment, “increaseth with the increase of God.” Blessed are they who prize this gift of God, and receive grace continually out of its immeasurable fulness!

These words not only reveal the special objects of Christian faith, the love of Christ, and his sacrifice for our sins; they teach us also that this sacrifice ought to be known and proclaimed. The Apostle himself here proclaims it to those Galatians who were entangled with heresy and halting in the faith. He does not keep it back as a reward of high attainments in grace; but places it as the foundation-stone of the Christian life. So also the first truth he taught to the Corinthians was, that “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.” How vain and foolish to pretend to be wiser than God, and to withhold from the Church that truth on which the very life of godliness de-

pend! The Apostle is here writing to corrupt churches, weak in faith. Yet this gift of Christ for our sins, is first, and middle, and last, in the message he sets before them. Gal. i. 4; ii. 16, 20; iii. 13; vi. 14. So must it be with all faithful messengers of Christ; and they who withhold this truth from the flock of his people, are faithless to their trust, and traitors to the wants of perishing sinners.

But further:—The love of Christ, and his atoning sacrifice, we are here taught, have a mighty power on the heart. “The life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” The truth did not lie idle and powerless in his memory. It became the mainspring of his conduct, the fountain of his life, the inmost law of his whole being. “Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” There was a deep, a mighty power in these truths, to fill his understanding with light, his heart with love, and his life with holiness. It was present to him, from hour to hour, as his strength against temptation, his motive to obedience; a strong and quickening power, to animate him in the service of his Lord. And so will it be, wherever it is humbly received. Faith in the Son of God, who loved us, must work by love. Faith in him “who gave himself for us,” must lead us to give ourselves unto him. The language of the soul will then be, “Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” It is not

a theory, nor a pretence, but a life in the soul ; and that life is, and must be, the spring of all holy obedience. The presence of the Saviour, and his love, and his sacrifice, are a threefold cord of divine power, to bind the soul as a living sacrifice to the horns of God's altar. He is near us and around us who loved us ; he is near us, and watching over us, who died for us : how then can we dare to neglect his love ; or how can we refuse to obey his voice, to rest on his mercy, and rely on his atoning sacrifice ? This gracious Lord hath searched and known us ; but all the sins which his searching eyes have discovered in us, " he hath borne himself in his own body on the tree." Blessed are they who have faith in his holy presence ; and still more blessed they who rejoice always in his dying love.

III. Let us now consider the personal application to our own souls. There is a point and fulness in the words—" Who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." The Apostle here sets us the high example of Christian faith, applying and claiming to itself the promises of the gospel. We may view the lesson in a threefold light. It includes a trust in the free message of Christ's love, the special witness of the Spirit to true believers, and the habit of personal communion with our Lord and Saviour.

The words imply, first, a trust in the general promises of the gospel, freely proclaimed to all sinners. Faith must rest on something which is true before it is believed. Such is the message

of God's love to sinners in Christ Jesus. It is true, even while they reject and slight it; but when they receive it, they become the sons of God, and other promises become theirs, in which they had no lot nor part before. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son." "God sent not his Son to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." It is the part of faith to believe the promises simply, to rest on them confidently, to read by their light the deep love in the heart of the Saviour; and thus to infer, with a full and sure conviction, "he loved me, and gave himself for me." Trouble not yourself, it says, with doubts and difficulties. Search not curiously into the decrees of God. Ask not, "How then can any perish?" Here is the record of the gift; here is the declaration of my own character—a lost and ruined sinner. Here is the love in the heart of God, confirmed by oath and promise; here is its triumph in the atoning sacrifice. "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." Let others perplex themselves with curious doubts, enough for me are the words which cannot lie. "God so loved the world, that he gave his Son" to die on the cross. The Son of God has tasted death for the lost, for

sinners, for all men. I believe, and I adore ;
“ he loved me, and gave himself for me.”

But we must go further, to obtain the full meaning of these words. For the faith which rests on a general promise needs to be confirmed by the assurance of a special interest in the Saviour's death. The love of Christ, once believed, works its own image in the heart. “ We love him, because he first loved us.” This love brings with it its own consciousness, full and deep in proportion to the fulness and depth of the work of grace. The spirit of the believer, like that of Peter, then bears witness to itself—
“ Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee.” Hence there arises a joyful assurance that we are indeed among the children of God, by faith in the Son of God, and love to his name. But this witness of our spirit to its own sincerity of love, may be clouded by sin, and obscured by remaining unbelief. Therefore the Lord, in his sovereign good pleasure, sometimes confirms it and strengthens it to the souls of his servants, by a direct and personal work of the Holy Ghost, echoing with his Divine voice the voice of the renewed conscience. In such times of spiritual joy, the Spirit himself beareth joint witness with the spirit of a Christian, that he is a child of God. Then he can take up the words of the text with a deeper meaning, in their innermost power, as words of holy consolation and assured hope. It is a living consciousness of the heart, and not an inference of the judgment. “ The life which I live in the flesh, I

live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"—for me, a member, though most unworthy, of his body, the true church, and a chosen heir of life eternal.

Finally, these words of appropriation imply also the habit of devout communion with our Lord and Saviour. The doctrines of the gospel may be received in name, and their power be forgotten. But wherever the words of St. Paul find a living echo in the heart, how different must its experience be! The truth is then a living reality to the soul. The searching presence of the living God is seen blended with all the grace of a dying Saviour. There is a daily intercourse of devout affection between the soul and him who died to redeem it. The language of the heart will be this—Jesus Christ is with his people always to the end of the world, and He is the same, to-day, and for ever. He is with me now unseen, and present still by his Spirit, and his thoughts concerning me are precious and wonderful every day. And this ever-present Lord hath loved, not only the thousands of his people, but me also. He hath given himself for me on the cross, and all the fulness of his grace is waiting to bless my soul. It is my sins that have pierced him; it is my curse that he has borne away; it is my weakness that he is ready to sustain; my wants that he is willing to supply, out of his own fulness and riches in glory. Having him for my portion, "I am full and abound," for all fulness dwells in him for my salvation. He has given *himself* for me; and

every other gift is centered in that one act of love, and lost in its brightness, as the stars are lost in the bright sunshine of heaven. Cares may beset me, trials may await me, storms may be around me,—but here is the anchor of my soul, sure and stedfast; the inner life of my spirit is secure. The world cannot harm it, time cannot impair it, death cannot arrest it; for “the life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

How blessed a state, my brethren, is this! O that each of you may strive to attain it, and never be content till it is your own! Strive to realize the presence of God, and remember always that he searcheth and knoweth you. But join this faith with the higher and deeper lesson of the love of Christ, the wondrous atonement of God manifested in the flesh. Then will the presence of God in Christ be to you a presence as delightful as solemn, as fruitful in peace and joy as in holy reverence. You will then be able to echo, like the Samaritans, the words of this great Apostle, and to say, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying only,” for we have seen and felt his love in our own souls, “and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

SERMON IV.

JEREMIAH XVII. 9.

THE HEART IS DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS, AND DESPERATELY WICKED: WHO CAN KNOW IT?

THE first step in all true religion, the foundation of godliness, is a deep and lively sense of the being, the power, and the presence of God. Under the gospel this truth appears in a new form, and is connected with the person of our Lord, the Incarnate Son of God, who searcheth the hearts and the reins, and is present with his people always, even to the end of the world. The next truth which needs to be impressed on us, is our true state, as fallen sinners, in the sight of a holy God. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Until we have learned our own guilt and corruption, we shall never prize the mercy of the Saviour, nor look heartily to Christ for salvation. We must first renounce the flatteries of our own hearts and of a deceitful world, and receive the faithful witness which is borne

to our true character and state in the word of God. Let us endeavour, then, from these words, first to unfold and confirm the description which is here given of the heart of man, and then gather some practical lessons from the brief and solemn enquiry, "Who can know it?"

I. "The heart is deceitful above all things." Such is the sentence of God's word, widely different from the language of our own self-flattery and secret pride. It is confirmed by the deep experience of the holiest men, and the further we advance in self-knowledge, the more humbly shall we confess the truth of the solemn description. Let us view it in some leading particulars, that impress it more fully on our own consciences.

And first, "the heart is deceitful above all things," *in its excuses for neglecting God*. Reason itself shews so plainly that the creature should obey its Creator, and the sinner should prepare to stand before his Judge, that it might seem as if no one could be so blind as to resist her voice. But the heart of man can frame a thousand excuses, to deceive itself, and justify its sinful neglect and indifference.

Some excuse themselves by the pressure of worldly business. They are cumbered with much serving, and the one thing really needful must stand by. They have so much to do in providing for their bodies, that their souls are quite forgotten. They think it reason enough for neglecting God's house or his word, for setting aside private and family prayer, that

their worldly business leaves them no time for these things. How deceitful must the heart be when such excuses can prevail. For what is the body to the soul? what is time to Eternity? What object on earth can be weighed in the balance against his favour who has made both the earth and the heavens? What earthly good can help us without his blessing, or make up for the misery of enduring his anger for ever? Surely madness is in the hearts of the sons of men, when such vain excuses can be so readily received to the ruin of their souls.

Some excuse themselves for the neglect of their souls, by purposes of amendment at some future time. They say to the message of the gospel, as Felix to Paul—"Go thy way, and when I have a more convenient season, I will send for thee." Now they are too much occupied; their cares and distractions are too many, or they wish to enjoy themselves a little longer. But next year, or at some distant day, they fully intend to seek after God, and make religion their main concern. How great the deceitfulness of the heart, when such an excuse can satisfy the conscience! For you know not what shall be on the morrow; even this night your soul may be required of you. And even if you were sure of years to come, your heart is hardening by every hour that you delay. If you are unwilling to repent to-day, you will be more unwilling to-morrow. If you prefer the world to heaven this year, the next will find you deeper in worldliness. If you are so blind as

to risk the salvation of the soul to-day for the trifles of earth, the blindness will only grow more complete and hopeless by putting off the work of repentance. The snares of the devil wind themselves deeper and deeper on your souls, every day that you consent to be still under their power. "Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation." Tomorrow may never come to you, except in eternity. Or if it comes, and you have been putting off repentance and prayer, it will find you worse than before; your heart more worldly, your conscience more seared, your vain excuses more confirmed, your willingness to continue in sin greater than ever. And surely when we see thousands delude themselves, like Felix, by these promises of amendment in time to come, we must confess that the heart is indeed "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

Others excuse their neglect by the faults and sins of Christ's professing people. They watch with a keen eye for the halting of those who draw near to the Lord at his table, or who are outwardly numbered among those who fear God. And when they find, or think they find, any infirmity, or sin, or disgraceful failing, they glory over it in their hearts. They have now, as they think, a full excuse for neglecting their salvation still. "Look," they say, "at your professors of strict religion; they are as bad or worse than others. I am better as I am; for though I make less pretence to be pious, I scorn to do such things as these professors do. I should

only be worse by making a profession like theirs, and may safely continue as I am."

What a world of deceit in the heart is disclosed to us here! For suppose that the fault and sin were real, and not merely the invention of malice, as it is often, or magnified by the love of scandal, what folly to suppose it an excuse for the ways of sin! Grant that every professor around you were an hypocrite or deceiver, will their guilt make your's the less? When *you* sink into hell for open ungodliness, will your anguish be less, because you have so many hypocrites for your miserable companions? Out of your own mouth you will be judged, and your vain excuses silenced. If you try the people of God by a higher standard, do you forget that you must be tried by the same? Will your not caring even to profess to serve Christ set you free from his authority, or make your ingratitude less base and vile to that Saviour who has bought you with his blood? O how miserable is this common pretence of profane and ungodly men for neglecting their Lord! It is really saying in their hearts—Others try to deceive God, and therefore I may openly defy him without danger. Others have a profession without the reality of religion, and therefore I shall be safe though I neither serve Christ, nor profess to serve him. What can we say of the heart that invents such pleas for neglecting God, but that it is truly "deceitful above all things," and that its wickedness is desperate and almost hopeless of cure?

A further excuse for neglecting the soul, is a blind and ignorant trust in God's mercy. This is a common and fatal deceit of the fallen heart. The mercy of God is the only real ground of hope and comfort. But the carnal sinner can pervert even this truth to his own ruin. That trust in God's mercy is blind and ignorant, which denies his threatenings, or despises his holiness, or neglects the only way by which mercy can be received. The message of God's word is plain, very plain—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, and goodness." "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." In the face of these warnings, and a thousand others, to rest blindly on God's mercy, while cleaving to our sins, is a direct affront offered to the God of holiness. It is to make him a liar, and might well provoke him to execute judgment at once against us. Mercy itself has its appointed channels, wherein only it can flow down to sinners. To look for it in any other way is folly and madness, a lie of the devil to deceive our souls. Faith in Christ and living holiness are the only road to heaven; and those

will be wretchedly undeceived, who walk in the broad road of destruction, and still expect that the mercy of God will secure them life and glory at the end of their journey.

Yet what numbers deceive themselves in this manner! The mercy of God is the only plea with which they shield themselves from the charge of folly and the fear of danger. They bless themselves in their heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, though I add drunkenness to thirst'—though I long for forbidden pleasures of sin, and freely indulge myself in enjoying them. Surely these excuses also are a striking proof that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

But this deceit of the heart may be learned, not only from its excuses for neglecting God, but from *its resolutions to serve him*. These are tainted with the same root of bitterness. Often they are hollow and insincere, often proud and self-righteous; and even at the best, unsteady, fickle, and wavering.

Our resolutions to serve God are too often hollow and deceitful. The heart of the sinner is like ice in a frost, melting a little in the sunshine, and soon freezing again. Like metal, it melts perhaps in the furnace of affliction, but soon hardens again. Such was the state of the Jews in the wilderness, "When he slew them, then they sought him, and turned early and enquired after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did

but lie unto him with their mouth and flatter him with their tongue. For their heart was not right with him, neither continued they stedfast in his covenant." Thus also God reproves Judah, by the prophet Jeremiah, "because they turned to him, not with the whole heart, but feignedly." How many such cases still occur! How many there are who promise fair on a bed of sickness; and when health is restored, turn to their old course of sin and worldliness. How many resolve to serve God, when their conscience is alarmed by some startling Providence, and then grow more careless than ever! Have none of you, my brethren, done this yourselves? You have had impressions, and they have died away. You have had deep convictions of sin, but you have stifled them. You have had alarms of coming judgment, but you have quenched them in worldly business or folly. Some voice of God in his house, some sickness or death in your homes, has awakened you for a time, and you have resolved to amend your lives and turn unto God; but your heart has soon started aside like a broken bow, and the sleep and stupor of your souls is as deep as ever. O how many a bed of sickness bears witness against those who have revolted from their own promises, and plunged themselves afresh into worldly lusts with a deeper guilt than before! These broken vows, these treacherous resolutions, are a painful and solemn proof, that the heart is indeed "deceitful above all things."

Where the purpose to serve God is not mere

hypocrisy and deceit, too often it is proud and self-righteous. The sinner makes a boast of his own outward reform. He makes clean the outside of the cup and platter, and then boasts of the change. The covetous heart soon prides itself on a few acts of bounty; the impure and lustful on a few steps taken backward, out of the mire of his gross and open sins. Then the temper of the Pharisee begins. Every work of seeming devotion is turned into a merit, and becomes the fuel of pride. There is no deep sense of guilt, no mourning of heart under the power of secret sin. Resolutions are made in the sinner's own strength, and in confidence on his own virtue; and his own glory, not the glory of God, is the object really in view. What are such resolutions but another proof of the heart's deceitfulness? How else could the guilty and ruined sinner turn the patchwork of his defiled services into a ground of merit before God? How else could we hope to please our Maker, while cherishing that pride which he detests and abhors? How deep must be the delusion in our hearts, when we can hope, by our own strength to root out evil from our souls, and think that by vows made in the spirit of pride and self-conceit we can earn for ourselves a place in the kingdom of God! How much of the religion of the church in all ages has been of this delusive nature! Men, vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds, have thought to please the living God by will-worship of their own invention; and often, like worshippers of saints

and the Virgin, have prided themselves most in their zeal, when most impiously transgressing the plain commands of God. In all this false religion, these efforts of self-righteous pride, we have another proof that the sentence in the text is indeed just and faithful.

But even where the purpose to serve God is sincere and honest, in a heart renewed by his grace, still at the best it is fickle and wavering. The natural deceit of the heart is doubly manifest when we observe how much deceit still remains in it after the work of grace is begun. Abraham, the father of the faithful, dissembles twice, in Egypt and before Abimelech. Jacob has faith to desire the birthright, and twice he grasps at the promise by deception and falsehood. Peter is full of confidence, but his heart betrays him, and he denies his Lord thrice, with oaths and cursing. He boldly confesses the truth of Christ for years in the midst of enemies, but he is carried away at Antioch with dissimulation. And so it has ever been found in the experience of God's children. Grace may be real, and still very weak; the heart may be in part renewed, but much deceit and treachery may remain within. Hence earnest prayers may be followed by great sins. To-day there may be deep conviction and holy resolution, and to-morrow folly, levity, and worldliness. Now, in the house of God, there may be a deep desire to serve him with the whole heart. To-morrow, in the business of the world, the impression may have passed away; God may be forgotten, and

the soul have sunk to the level of the worldling. The history of the Jews in the desert was written for our learning. In that glass we may see the fickleness of our own hearts. Our best resolutions have no strength in themselves ; they need the grace of the Holy Spirit to confirm them, and give them a real power. The good that we would we do not, and the evil that we hate, that we do. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak. The strength soon fails, the hands hang down, and the knees are feeble, when we attempt to fulfil our solemn vows, and to serve God with the whole heart. This fickleness of will, this slipperiness of our resolutions, these frequent backslidings from our solemn covenant, are a further proof that our hearts, by nature, are "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

The same truth may be seen, further, in *the false and flattering judgment which men pass upon their own state*. It is against this form of deceit that the sentence of the text seems directly aimed. The spirit of God has just parted mankind into two great classes. The first are those who perish, and the others are those who are in the way of salvation. Of the former it is said, that they trust in man, and their heart departeth from the Lord. Of the others, that they trust in the Lord, and make the Lord their hope. The one are cursed, the others are blessed. The one have the sentence pronounced against them, "they shall not see when good cometh ;" but the others shall be like

trees planted by the rivers, fruitful and blessed for ever.

Where there is so wide a contrast in the character and in the lot, we might have thought that no one could remain careless, or indifferent to their own share in the promise. If the blessing be so full, and the curse so fearful, who would not flee from the curse, and long to obtain the blessing? Who would rest content to be uncertain of his own state, where the prize is so momentous, and the effect of a mistake would be so fearful? We might have thought that no child of man, who heard this message of God, would rest, until he had gained a full assurance that he was free from the curse, and a sharer in the promise. But the Holy Spirit warns us here that such will not be the case. It is true there is a wide contrast between these opposite states, of those who trust in man, and those whose hope is in the Lord. It is true that the curse is dreadful, and the blessing unspeakably great. It is true that every one belongs to one of these two classes, and that none should be content until assured that the blessing is theirs. "But the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." It deceives men as to their real state, and makes them willing to be deceived. It flatters them with its smooth words, saying to the sinners, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." It blinds their eyes to the clear marks of prevailing sin and worldliness. It makes them ready to take up with vain mockeries and forms, instead of the religion of the

heart. It puffs them up with a vain and false confidence in God's mercy, while they despise his holiness, and cast his words behind them. It has a thousand windings and doublings, to excuse them from the need of a true conversion unto God, and to make them well content with a form of godliness, while they deny its power. In short, it is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." It leads thousands and millions to bless themselves in their heart, while they are still under the curse, and travelling in the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

Such appears to be the direct purpose of the Spirit of God in this solemn text. And, my brethren, does not experience confirm it daily? Do we not see drunkards, and sabbath-breakers, and open sinners, flattering themselves that all is well, and that through God's mercy they shall reach heaven at last? Do we not see thousands rest in their moral decency as their title to life, with scarce one thought of the Saviour and his atoning blood; and yet think themselves safe, although plainly they are trusting in themselves, and not hoping in the Lord? How is it that multitudes continue, week after week, unchanged, under the clear light of the gospel? They deceive themselves on their own state. They do not search their own consciences. They are even willing and glad to be deceived, though eternal happiness or misery depends on their knowing the truth. And what can we infer from this fearful delusion, so common and almost universal in the visible church, but that our

text is indeed true, and our heart, by nature, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?"

The same truth appears, with equal plainness, from the character of *our private and public worship*. If ever there were a time when sincerity might seem to be certain, and the attempt to deceive impossible, it is when we present ourselves in the presence of the heart-searching God. The bare act of worship implies our belief that God is present, though unseen, and that He knows the thoughts of our hearts, and the prayers and praises we offer before him. To mock such a holy and all-wise God with a pretence and empty show, must be folly and madness. We might think, then, that even the worldly would worship with reverence, if not with love; and the true Christian both with love and reverence. But here, too, "the heart is deceitful above all things." Many it leads to content themselves with a vain bodily service, while their thoughts are in the ends of the earth, or buried in their bags of gold and silver. "They draw near to God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, but their heart is far from him." And where the worship is not quite a mockery and a pretence, how impure it is, and defiled! Even in real believers and servants of God, what a fearful mixture of sin! What coldness and deadness in prayer! What dulness in praise! When they confess their sins, how little they feel them; and when in words they acknowledge their mercies, how little real gratitude arises

within! What vain thoughts infest their services, and what countless distractions mingle with the incense of their offering, and render it loathsome and defiled! Often, when their lips are praising God, their hearts are coveting the applause of men; and when they are outwardly confessing their sins, they are inwardly repeating and increasing them. And all this they do, while the act of worship implies that they believe God is present, and knows the secrets of their thoughts. How are we to explain this strange contrast, and the deplorable folly of such worship? What key can unlock to us this mystery—a guilty sinner, under the eye of the thrice holy God, adding to and multiplying his own sins, in the very moment when his lips confess and deplore them, and own them to deserve God's anger and eternal ruin? Surely the key is to be found here, and here only—"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"

One last proof of the same truth may be found in the backslidings and falls of true believers. When once the soul has turned to God, and tasted of his goodness, we might have supposed that it could never turn again to vanity and folly. When Christ has once been seen in his true glory, as the Saviour; sin, we might have thought, would have lost its power for ever. But even where divine grace has found entrance, the old leaven of the heart's deceit still remains. "Who could have expected adultery from David, after such communion with God? impatience

from Jeremiah, after such revelations from God? idolatry from such a man as Solomon, after so much wisdom from God? fretfulness from Jonah, after such deliverances from God? fearfulness in such a man as Abraham, after so much protection from God? cursing from such a man as Job, after so much patience and experience from God?" This is, indeed, the crowning proof of the heart's deceitfulness, that it can still deceive those, who have been awakened to know its corruption, and have felt the happiness of Christ's service. "The good that they would, they do not." Their conscience is too often blinded afresh by the seductions of the world. They grow proud of their own confessions, and vain of their own humility. The grace they have received from Christ becomes itself the occasion of estranging their hearts from him; and the streams that flow from his goodness, make them satisfied without the fountain. Hence too often they forget their first love. After countless mercies their faith grows weaker, and their hope burns with a dimmer flame. They halt in their Christian course, and their souls, which once seemed mounting to heaven, cleave again to the dust! Whence this surprising change? Why this fearful declension in those who have tasted the goodness of the Lord? Surely here we see, in its clearest light, the truth of this solemn warning. How deceitful must the heart be, when, even after it has been changed by grace, it wavers between the service of Christ and of the devil; and when God has brought us out with a mighty arm from the

bondage of reigning sin, it still rebels in the wilderness, and hankers after the flesh-pots of Egypt! With such a traitor in our bosom, so constant in its delusions, how do we need to practise the divine exhortation, and to "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!"

Let us now turn for a moment to the practical lessons which this solemn truth should impress on us, and which are implied in that brief inquiry, "Who can know it?"

And here, the first lesson should be one of deep abasement in the sight of God. There is a depth of hidden evil in our hearts, which we cannot fathom. We are often ready to go far for sights of wonder, or to listen greedily to the accounts of surprising prodigies and marvels. But there is a wonder within our own breasts on which we do not care to dwell. There is a hidden depth of deceit, which none of us know; which only the wisdom of God can fully discover, and nothing but his grace can remedy or remove. There is more evil in us than we have ever suspected, and more windings of hypocrisy than we have been able, even if we have attempted, to explore. Is not this a thought suited to humble us in the sight of God? Proud and self-righteous sinner! there is a depth within that you have never fathomed, but, alas! it is a depth of unknown iniquity. Decent and plausible worldling! there is a wild ocean under that smooth ice of worldliness, which has only to be

broken up by temptation, and it will be found a great deep of sin, which has its fountains in the still lower abyss of hell. The soul of man is not only immortal, but infinite. If evil, it is in the grasp of infinite evil ; as, when renewed, it lies in the embrace, and receives supplies from the fountain, of infinite goodness. O let us learn, then, like David, to confess our sins before God, and to offer that prayer more earnestly than ever—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Next, let us join in the prayer of David, for the searching eye of God to discover to us our true state before him. We cannot know our own sin. The enemy is not only too powerful for us to overcome—it is also too subtle for us to unmask, without the help of God. And it is an enemy that will ruin us for ever, if it be not discovered and overcome. How much we need, therefore, to offer that earnest request, "Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Here is the only remedy for an evil so deep and so deadly. The deceit of the heart must lead us to apply for help to the infinite wisdom of the Saviour. He can discover all its secret windings, and by his almighty grace break in pieces every snare of the enemy, and conduct our souls in safety to his own kingdom.

Another lesson taught by this solemn truth, is that of continual watchfulness and mutual

exhortation. The deceiver is within. Every moment we are exposed to its snares, and ready to be deluded by its subtle temptations. Let us therefore be sober, and watch unto prayer. We can never be safe when we cease to be on our guard. A self-recollection of heart, a continual prayer in the depth of the spirit, becomes those who know they have such an enemy within. This is the charge of our Lord, and echoed by all his apostles: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." "Watch ye, stand fast in the Lord." "Be ye sober, and watch unto prayer." The humbler our view of our own natural state, the more vigilant we shall be "to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on life eternal."

Finally, let us adore that grace which is stronger than sin, and deeper than corruption. "The heart is deceitful above all things." "But where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded." Ten thousand hearts, once deceitful as others, have been changed by the love of Christ, and quickened and renewed by his grace, till they have been made meet to share in the holy joys of God's paradise. Grace has overcome their sin, and been mightier than their corruptions. How wonderful is the power that could prevail over such an enemy! how surprising the depth of that love, which can fill up the void of a heart that is unfathomable! How deep should be our gratitude that a ransom has been found, which can atone even for this unbounded deceit—this desperate and fearful wick-

edness! Let the humbling sense, then, of our own natural perverseness kindle our souls to a more lively adoration of the love of God to sinners, and lead us to a more hearty devotedness to that blessed Captain of salvation, who can guide us safely through all the snares of our own hearts, and the deceits of the devil, and land us safely in his own blessed and everlasting kingdom.

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SERMON V.

TITUS II. 14.

WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US, THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM US
FROM ALL INIQUITY, AND PURIFY UNTO HIMSELF A PE-
CULIAR PEOPLE ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.

THE first step in true religion is a deep sense of the power, the presence, the holiness, and majesty of the living God. This truth, once engraven on our hearts, will lead us to see our fallen estate, as guilty sinners. We cannot remember the holy eye of God, which is ever upon us, and not feel that we have indeed "sinned, and come short of his glory." Then, and not until then, will the power of the gospel be felt, or the Saviour be precious in our eyes. But when we know and feel that our hearts, by nature, are deceitful above all things, and that God alone can search the depth of their corruption, we shall welcome the messages of Divine grace. The words of the text will then open to our view with a divine power and beauty. We are indeed guilty sinners, but we have a

mighty Saviour. Our hearts are deceitful and corrupt, but there is one who can heal their worst diseases. Jesus, the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour, "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." How blessed and complete is the promise in these words! Let us dwell, first, on the gift itself, and its general purpose; and then, on its full application in the hearts and lives of the people of God.

I. These words teach us, first of all, the wonderful gift of Divine love—"Who gave himself for us." A short message, but stored with infinite wonders, which all eternity cannot fully reveal. Saints and angels, through countless ages, will explore this mystery of love, and find it still unsearchable. May the Holy Spirit enable us, in some measure, to enter into their meaning; while we consider, first, the Giver himself; next, the greatness of the gift; then, the persons for whom it is made, and the manner in which it is bestowed.

Who is it that gave himself for us? The Apostle has just proclaimed his glory. It is our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Such is the exact force of his words. What a wonderful view does it open to us—the mystery of godliness, even "God manifest in the flesh!"

The Person "who gave himself for us," is THE GREAT AND ETERNAL GOD. He was with God in the beginning, and he was God. "All things were made by him, and without him not

one single thing was made that was made." Of him the Psalmist declares—"Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever." "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands." When Isaiah saw his glory, and spake of him, he heard the Seraphim exclaim in his presence, with veiled faces, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (John xii. 41. Isaiah vi. 3, 4.) This gives its deepest wonder to the work of redemption. The Creator of all things became a creature, and shared in the nature of man; the Fountain of infinite holiness was "made sin for us;" and he who is "God over all, blessed for ever," to redeem us from the curse, was made a curse for us. We ought to carry this truth into every region of nature, and every event of providence. When we gaze on the stars, and think of those boundless worlds of light, which science discovers, and, while she discovers them, is lost in their immensity, let us remember—He who made all these has given himself for our souls. When we trace the wonders of creation in this lower world, and mark the infinite wisdom in all the variety of life around us, let us reflect—the Maker of these wonders, the Fountain and Source of all this varied wisdom, has become man, and suffered for our salvation. It is no mere angel, but the great God, one with the Father, and "who thought it no robbery to be equal with God," of whom we are told here, in these simple words—"He gave himself for us!" O how

overwhelming this truth would appear, if we heard it for the first time, and really felt its power ! How solemn a truth for each one of us, to be living in that world, where the great and almighty God himself has become incarnate, and lived and suffered in mortal flesh for the redemption of sinners !

But he is also the Saviour. He is one who is able to save to the uttermost ; and not only able, but willing also. He has all power, to bear the curse for his people, and to remove it. He has all wisdom, to guide them through every snare, and to bring them safe to their journey's end. And he has all love, to delight in their happiness, and to bestow on them the richest treasures of his grace. God, the Saviour—this is the glorious union in the titles of our Lord. He has all power to bless those that call upon him ; and he has all grace, as a most merciful Saviour, to delight in rescuing souls from death, and in bestowing full and free salvation upon all his servants and followers.

But this great God and Saviour has now become incarnate for our salvation. He has a name, given to him on his birth into this sinful world, a token that he is truly a son of man, while it proclaims his glory as the Son of God. " His name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." We are taught by this name that he is indeed " God our Saviour ;" and yet that he is the Son of the virgin, announced by the angel at Nazareth, born at Bethlehem, and circumcised the eighth day, and

thus “born of a woman and made under the law.” His office is to deliver his people from sin, and he wears it enregistered even in his name. He is also the Christ, the anointed of God. As Prophet, he has all wisdom to enlighten us ; as Priest, all holiness to be a pure sacrifice and offering for us ; and as King, he has a divine and heavenly authority and power, to controul his enemies, and rule in the hearts and lives of his people. And this great God and Saviour is ours. He has entered into a gracious covenant with us. He has bound himself by repeated and solemn promises, and is pleased graciously to account himself the portion of his own people.

How glorious, then, is the Person of the Giver, here set before us ! What an infinite value does this fix on every part of the gift, and on all the work he wrought for us here below ! It is God himself who stooped to become incarnate. It is the Lord of heaven and earth, who is become our Saviour, and has taken the holy name of Jesus, to be a pledge that he will save us from our sins. When we reflect on this one truth, we may well be lost in wonder and amazement, and exclaim with the Psalmist—“ What is man that thou art so mindful of him ? or the son of man that thou so visitest him ? ”

But these words set before us, not only the person of the Giver, but the excellence of the gift. He gave himself. The gift is as noble as he is who bestows it ; nay, the Giver and the gift are one and the same. He has not bestowed on us outward things merely, gold or silver or

earthly riches. He has not given stars for our inheritance, and showered worlds with their treasures on his servants as their highest portion. He has done far more, for he has given himself. And in what sense? and what are the benefits thus conveyed? In this one word he has given us all things. He has become a full and perfect atonement for all sin; and he has opened to us a fountain and treasury of all grace. His merits are ours, to atone for us; his sufferings are ours, to remove the curse from our souls. He has given himself, with all his wisdom to guide us, with all his long-suffering to bear with us; with all his compassion, to pity us; with all his strength, to sustain us; and with all his Divine righteousness, to render us accepted before God. In this one gift there is treasured all the fulness of grace for our souls. All love, and joy, and peace, holiness and zeal, humility and gladness, reside in him as their inexhaustible fountain; and from him the lost sinner may obtain them freely for his present and eternal salvation. It is with his own sufferings that he redeems us, by his own life that he teaches and guides us, and with his own Spirit that he blesses, sustains, and cheers us. The gift, like the Giver himself, is divine. We can never fathom its depth of grace; we can never exhaust its treasures of love. From the streams here supplied the Church has drunk life and joy through all past ages; and the millions of his saints will draw holiness and happiness from the same blessed fountain through the countless

ages to come. This truth—he gave himself—will for ever baffle the thoughts of the highest archangel to search out its full meaning. And it becomes a warrant to the believer for hopes that have no limit, and opens the prospect to his soul of a glory inconceivable in its vastness. For “He that spared not his own son, but gave him up for us all—how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?”

But we are reminded further, in the text, of the persons to whom the gift is made. It is given *for us*. And what is the character of the persons here intended? The Apostle unfolds it in the next chapter,—“For we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” He dwells on the same truth in another passage—“For scarcely for a righteous man will any one die, yet peradventure for the good man some one might dare even to die. But God commendeth his own love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Here, then, is the power and emphasis of the words, “He gave himself for *us*.” It was for *us*, miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and the shadow of death. It was for those who were “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” For such creatures the Creator stooped down from heaven. For such rebels the King of glory was nailed to the tree. For those who were thus vile and hateful, the Lord of all holiness poured out his soul unto death;

and to those who were living in malice and envy unveiled all the secret treasures of his own infinite love. We were guilty, and he gave himself for an atoning sacrifice : we were blind and foolish, and he gave himself to be our captain of salvation : we were dead in trespasses and sins, and he who is the Prince of life, gave himself to be a fountain of eternal life to our souls. Here is a contrast beyond measure deep and wonderful. The vessels are impure, and he cleanses them ; they are frail and broken, he strengthens and repairs them ; they are empty, and he fills them with his own goodness. For the foolish he has stores of wisdom ; for the disobedient he has quickening and sanctifying grace. For the deceived he has the spirit of revelation to enlighten them ; and for the slaves of lust and pleasure, he has Almighty power, to loose them from their bondage, and make them free indeed. He finds their souls full of malice and envy, and he fills them with gentleness, meekness, and truth. He finds them hateful and hating others ; but he gives himself to them, with all his own secret grace ; and behold, instead of the thorn there is the fir-tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle. Hatred and malice are driven away by this heavenly gift ; and holiness in all its dignity, and love in all its tenderness, are planted in their room.

And how is this gift bestowed ? There are five stages which we may notice, by which the heavenly treasure is conveyed to sinners. First, by an eternal counsel and covenant of love.

Even before the worlds were made, this covenant of grace was in being. This gift of eternal life in Christ, as we read in the same epistle, God, who cannot lie, had promised before the world begun. This Lamb of God, in the purpose of His own love, and the appointment of the Father's wisdom, was slain from the foundation of the world. Here is the hidden fountain whence every stream of mercy flows down to a sinful race. It is all "according to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This gift is further conveyed to us in the Incarnation of our Lord. Here was the first main step in the fulfilment of this secret counsel. Our Lord rejoiced to enter into this world and to take upon him our flesh, that he might actually fulfil his work of love, and give himself for sinners. "Then, said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Then the Son of God emptied himself of his divine glory, and surrendered his own person to a human life of shame and sorrow, to obedience and suffering, that he might really give himself as one continual offering, for the glory of his Father and the salvation of mankind. The secret gift of his eternal counsel now became manifest to the hosts of angels; and they worshipped, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and in earth, peace, goodwill towards men!"

The death of our Lord is a further stage in

this divine gift. So our Lord, at the last supper, "This is my body which is given for you." "Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot unto God." "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." "Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice unto God for a sweet smelling savour." This was the most wonderful part of the gift, and the most surprising stage of its bestowment on sinners. The Son of God gave up his own life to the curse, that he might atone for our sins. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." Therefore he gave his own body to be broken, and his own blood to be shed for us; and poured out his very soul unto death in those hours of agony, that it might become a magnet of infinite power to draw our hearts unto himself, and a gift of unspeakable worth to store and enrich our souls. On this truth the eye of faith rests and fixes itself with peculiar joy, while the believer echoes the words of the Apostle—"He loved me, and gave himself for me." The gift was wonderful and amazing, the eternal Son of the Father. And the manner in which it was given to sinners was no less wonderful, by shame and agony, in the garden, and on the cross. His sacred body was exposed to the gaze of the scorners; his hands and his feet, his precious side, were all pierced with the nails and the spear, that the gift might be consummated, and the offering of love be complete and entire. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift in a dying Saviour.

This gift is conveyed to us, further, by the preaching of the gospel. This is the grand means of salvation which God has appointed, the means of conveying the love of the Saviour and the gift of his love, into the hearts of sinners. Other means are to be used and honoured ; but this is the first and chief, from whence all the others derive their power. "Christ sent me," the Apostle declares, "not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." It is by the word of truth, that Christians are begotten of God, to be a first-fruits of his creatures. It is by this "incorruptible seed of the word that abideth for ever" they are born again into newness of life, and learn to "love one another with a pure heart fervently." Here in the gospel, the whole gift is made over, in a free and gracious promise, to all that ask for it, to all that long for it, to all that believe it and earnestly desire to attain it. The message is wide and ample—"Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. Come, buy and eat ; yea, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Those who reject the gospel, like the Jews at Antioch, put away from them eternal life. God gave the inheritance to Abraham by promise, and by the promise of the gospel he still bestows this rich inheritance of grace on his people. The blessing is held out before them by his free and sovereign bounty, and there is a hearty and sincere invitation of love, calling them and beseeching them to receive the gift and become partakers of the benefit. When our Lord

ascended on high, "he gave gifts unto men;" and these were no other than the commissioned messengers of the gospel, by whom these treasures of his dying love were to be proclaimed to the world. "He gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers." The sacrifice on the cross is thus brought home to the ears and consciences of men, that they may believe and be saved.

The last stage in this gift is the effectual work of God's Spirit in the heart. Then only it becomes a living reality to the sinner. He, the blessed Comforter, takes of the things of Christ, and reveals them. He applies the blood of the Lord Jesus to cleanse the conscience, and the righteousness of the Saviour to be the stay and strength of the soul. He applies all the treasures of grace in the heart of the Son of God to the hearts of men, to melt them into sorrow, and then to win them into love and holiness. He rears anew the temple of God within the soul; and then, from the fulness of Christ, brings all the fragrant spices, and precious jewels, of which the Lord himself is the divine treasury, to enrich and beautify the hearts of his children. By his secret work, and his inward application of the gift of Christ, that promise is thus fulfilled in their happy experience—"Through wisdom is an house builded, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches." Then the gift becomes complete, when Christ dwells by his Spirit in the heart, and

stores it with all those lovely graces which flow from the knowledge of his dying grace, the power of his resurrection, and the hope of his glory.

But these words set before us, not only the gift but also the great purpose for which it is bestowed. It is "that he might redeem us from all iniquity."

We are here taught the real condition in which Christ finds his people. They are sinful, full of iniquity, of all iniquity. It is "not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy that he saves." Our sins will not shut us out from his grace, if they do not make us too proud to receive it. We are fallen, but he can raise us; we are lost, but he comes to seek and save us; we are needy and helpless, but he is mighty to save, and can supply all our need, according to his own riches in glory. This is the first lesson in the school of Christ, to know our true state as sinners, that the healing remedy of his free grace may be applied to our souls.

He comes "to redeem us." The words imply a state of bondage. And this is twofold. We are slaves and captives, under the curse of a broken law, and the power and strength of our own corruptions. From both of these he comes to redeem us. He sets us free from the curse by his own death, for he has been made a curse for us. When we gaze on that mystery of love, the conscience is set free, the burden of sin is removed and falls. Faith transfers the burden

of all guilt to the head of the victim, that spotless Lamb of God, who is the propitiation for our sins. In this mighty provision for the full peace of the sinner's conscience the saying is fulfilled—"By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

There is a further bondage, in the power of corruption, and the strength of indwelling sin. But the heavenly gift removes this bondage also. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." There is a secret virtue in the sight of the crucified Son of God, which melts the soul into godly sorrow, and makes sin bitter and hateful. By the cross, even more than by the commandment, it becomes exceeding sinful. The eyes are opened to its danger and its vileness. Love is kindled in the heart, to resist and overcome it by a mightier power. A spiritual life, born of the Spirit, is implanted, and this lusteth against the flesh, and seeks to crucify those sins which have crucified the Lord. The veil of delusion is torn away from our eyes; the sorceries of hell can deceive us no longer, when we see the groans and agonies of the eternal Son of God. Hence every day, in the heart of the believer, the type is fulfilled; the house of David waxes stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul weaker and weaker. The remains of captivity may trouble him, but still he rejoices to know that the chains are loosening daily, and that when this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, the last cord of sin will be dissolved also, and pass away for ever. For Jesus came to redeem

his people from its power as well as its curse ; and wherever, as Priest, he frees the conscience from guilt, he begins, as the King of righteousness, to free the heart from the love and reign of corruption.

Further, this purpose of his love is universal in its range. "He gave himself, to redeem us from all iniquity." There can be no peace between sin and the Saviour. It was a complete salvation which he designed to bring. Not one Canaanite is to be left alive, nor one idol to remain standing in the temple of God. Our selfishness is to be changed into love, our unbelief into confidence, our slavish fear into filial hope, our vain desires and evil tempers into holy and pure affections. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." There are new desires after holiness, new delight in the word of God, new joy in prayer and praise, new habits of willing obedience. Every faculty of the soul receives a fresh direction before unknown, and is consecrated to the glory of God. The prayer of the converted sinner is the same as of repenting Israel—"Take away all iniquity;" and the answer it receives is the same: for God subdues his iniquities by His grace, and casts all his sins into the depths of the sea, by His own sovereign power, and His free and forgiving love.

These words imply, further, the deep sincerity of this purpose of love. "He gave himself, that he might redeem us." The heart of the

Saviour was set upon this great work. He came into the world, and left the throne of his glory, that the power of sin might be destroyed. He was manifested in a mortal body, that "through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil." He lived and laboured, that he might bring lost sheep to the fold of his grace. He groaned in agony in the garden, that we might "resist even unto blood, agonizing against sin." "He poured out his soul unto death," that those cleansing streams might be a purifying fountain, and a full atonement for the sins of the whole world. There was an earnest longing of love, from first to last, in the whole of this great work. So that the deliverance of sinners from their sins is called the travail of the Redeemer's soul, and it is only when this is fulfilled, that his heart is satisfied. He then "rests in his love, and rejoices over them with singing."

Finally, these words lead us forward to a blessed prospect, when his purpose of love shall be entirely fulfilled in the church of God. They are a glimpse that opens into that world to come, the paradise of our God; and what do they reveal to us? In that kingdom of God the Saviour's love will be satisfied, and his desire accomplished, in the full redemption of his people. What then will be their happy state! All iniquity will be done away. Its curse will for ever have ceased, its chains will have fallen away, and the happy soul will exult in its heavenly freedom. The body, "sown in cor-

ruption, will be raised in incorruption ; and sown in dishonour, it will be raised in glory." The soul, in every power, will rejoice in the sense of a redemption that is complete. No evil temper, no unholy desire, no vain thoughts, no vile imaginations, to infest the temple of the heart, or to mingle discord with the melody of its praise. Every grace will bloom in its full perfection, every faculty unfold itself in its heavenly beauty. Love will be in every heart, praise and thanksgiving in every tongue. The depth and tenderness of that holy love will be reflected from eye to eye, without one suspicion of secret and hidden evil, to mar the full sympathy of their ransomed souls. "With the voice together shall they sing ; they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." And all this joy will be crowned and heightened by the thought—it is the unspeakable gift which has procured it, and the wounds of a dying Saviour are the sources from whence it flows. "He gave himself, that he might redeem us ;" and his love will then have prevailed. The brightness of every dew-drop will be only a reflection from his glory who is the Sun of Righteousness ; and every stream of joy will yield a deeper blessedness, because it borrows its beauty from that eternal fountain of love. O what a glorious prophecy can faith discern in these simple words, "He gave himself, to redeem us from all iniquity !" That purpose of love cannot and will not fail. And therefore, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein righ-

teousness shall dwell for ever ; and are sure that a world such as eye hath never seen and ear hath never heard, pure, blessed and holy, such as hath never entered the heart of man, is even now awaiting the servants and children of God.

And now, in closing, let us apply the subject, in one or two plain lessons to ourselves, that it may quicken our own hearts, and stir them up to repentance and prayer.

First, then, inquire, Is this purpose of the Lord Christ fulfilled in your own hearts? He died to redeem us from iniquity. Have these fruits of his death begun to be accomplished in each of you? Is your conscience freed from guilt by a believing view of his atonement? Are your hearts delivered from the reign of sin by the deep sense of his dying love? Or has He rather to complain—I called, and ye refused; I stretched forth my hand, and no man regarded? O, my brethren, examine yourselves, and see whether you be really in the faith, and whether this heavenly gift has begun to produce its due effect on your souls. If not, then remember that solemn warning; “Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” Let not the greatness of the gift, through your ingratitude and neglect, become a millstone to sink you into heavier ruin.

Next, meditate on the greatness of the mercy set before you in the gospel. It is no common gift which has been given to you. O think much of its greatness. Call to mind the glory of the everlasting Son of God, by whom the flowers were clothed with their beauty, and the stars had their bright courses ordained ! Think on the wonder of his condescension, who left the throne of heaven, to be born of the Virgin, and laid in the manger. Meditate on his agonies and sufferings, and on his shameful death ; and remember that for you he endured it, and that his gracious purpose was to root out your sins, and deliver you from their power. This do, and virtue will go forth from this heavenly gift, to renew and redeem your souls. The power of sin will fade away from your spirit, as darkness before the beams of morning. The world will cease to ensnare you, and the power of sense and sin will be overcome by the holy victories of faith and love.

Lastly, think of the future triumph of this work of redemption. Now we see it daily marred by remaining corruption, and stained with many defilements that still cleave to the people of God. But the time is at hand when the earthen pitchers shall be broken, and the heavenly light within, now obscured and hidden, will shine forth in its celestial beauty. Think much on this coming day. Realize this redemption of Christ, as it will appear, when the last traces of iniquity shall have passed away from the children of God. Then its true gran-

deur will reveal itself to your eyes. You will see that this is the great work for yourselves, to be sharers in this redemption; and that this should be your one desire for others, that they too may be renewed in spirit, and made heirs of this glory. No shadow of religion will then deceive you; nothing that does not spring from the gift of Christ, that does not fill you with the love of Christ, and prepare you for a joyful welcome when he shall appear. It is a great and glorious work which you have to pursue. The enemies are strong, the temptations many; but O remember the bright and eternal issue to those who overcome. Then will you persevere to the end, in fighting the good fight of faith; and at the last you shall swell the anthem of that blessed and innumerable throng, who cry with loud voices in the temple of heaven, "Salvation to our God, that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever."

SERMON VI.

TITUS II. 14.

WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US, THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM US
FROM ALL INIQUITY, AND PURIFY UNTO HIMSELF A PE-
CULIAR PEOPLE, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.

FROM this verse we have considered the unspeakable gift of God, in the death of the Lord Jesus, and the great purpose for which he was offered. Let us now, from the last words, unfold the application of this Divine gift, in the hearts and lives of the people of God. The purpose of the Saviour, in laying down his life on the cross, was "to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." So rich and wonderful a gift was not to be offered in vain. Its effects were to be answerable, in some degree, to its own greatness; and innumerable souls were to be freed by it from the bondage of sin, and made heirs of eternal glory. The Redeemer was to see of the travail of his soul, and fruits of righteousness, lasting as eternity, were to issue from this work of Divine love.

Let us trace the benefits of His passion, as they are here briefly set before us. They are purity and holiness, consecration to God, separation from the world, the mutual communion of love, and abounding zeal in the service of the Lord.

I. The first object of the Saviour, in his work of grace to sinners, is their renewal unto holiness. He died that he might purify them; and he lives now to carry on the same blessed design.

Our natural state is one of corruption and ruin. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." But our blessed Lord came into the world to repair these hateful ravages of sin and wickedness. He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. He never meant to rescue sinners from deserved punishment, and leave them still in their pollution. It was his holiness, as well as his love, that brought him from heaven; and the salvation which he offers is a holy salvation. "He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people *from* their sins." To make sin hateful to us, and holiness delightful, is the common object of his life, his death, and his resurrection. He opens to sinners, by his cross, a new and living way of access unto God; but the way is called "a way of holiness." Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and no others, will be filled with the blessings of his salvation.

The seat of this purity is the heart. It is vain and foolish to make clean the outside only of the cup and platter, and to leave all impurity

and filthiness within. The heart itself must be purified, before the purpose of the Saviour can be fulfilled. Such is the fruit of the gospel, wherever it is received in its power. The will is renewed, and made obedient to the will of God. The affections of the soul are fixed upon heavenly things. Evil desires are rooted out and destroyed, while a spiritual mind is formed within. The word of God becomes precious; prayer and praise, and all acts of holy worship, a pleasure and delight. The glory of God is the supreme end, which the Christian, thus purified, aims after; and his constant desire is to shew forth the praises of his heavenly Father, who has called him from the darkness of sin into the marvellous light of his own grace, mercy, and loving-kindness. Then the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, and peace—all of them are multiplied and abound. And thus the heart, which once was a cage of unclean and hateful affections and lusts, becomes now like a watered garden, fragrant with holy thoughts, and rich with the sweet and varied incense of prayer, and praise, and devout thanksgiving.

The source of this purity is the dying love of Christ. This is the divine mainspring, and sends its constraining power through every chamber of the soul. The view of his cross melts the spirit into godly sorrow, and lays it open to the free and blessed influences of the Spirit of God. His words are spirit and life; and wherever they fall upon the heart, they have a quickening power; they reveal the greatness of his love,

and kindle gratitude in the heart of the sinner. His condescension destroys the bitter roots of pride ; his sufferings melt away our selfishness, and change it into adoring love. "We love him because he first loved us." Thus a new and infinite power lays hold on the affections of the soul, and by degrees purifies it from indwelling sin. The nearer this heavenly magnet draws us to itself, the more irresistible it becomes. We behold the glory of a love which is infinite and everlasting, and "we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory." The shadows of sin melt away, its stains are removed ; step after step the soul advances in the way of holiness, till the last remains of corruption are abolished for ever, and swallowed up in the brightness of the Lord's appearing.

The means by which this purity is attained is a simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the whole work he has wrought for our salvation. The hearts of the disciples of Christ, now as of old, are purified only by faith. For faith unites the soul to him who is the Fountain of holiness. It brings us into contact and communion with heavenly truth. It raises our hearts into living fellowship with the thrice holy God, and keeps the great offering, paid as the ransom for our sins, ever before our eyes. Hence it cannot fail to purify. It is only when we forget whose Presence is around us, that we can indulge our sins. It is when the truth of Christ slips from our memory—his sufferings for our sake, his pure and unspotted holiness, his

rich and unbounded thoughts and purposes of love towards us—then, and then only, can his service be thought a weariness, or the old corruptions of the heart prevail against us. But when, by a lively faith, we “walk in the light of his countenance,” the dark shadows of temptation flee away and disappear. When the windows of a chamber are fast closed to the light, no besom can ever sweep out the darkness. But once let in the sunlight, and the gloom vanishes in a moment. So also, no efforts of self-righteous zeal, without the knowledge of Christ, can clear away the hidden corruption of the soul. It is only when, by faith, the windows of the spirit are opened, to behold the love of the Saviour, that the darkness of sin is dispelled, and the Day-star in all his immortal purity arises in our hearts.

II. A second fruit of the gospel, here set before us, is consecration to the service of Christ. The design of the Saviour was not only to purify us, but also “to purify us unto himself.” It is no mere abstract holiness that he imparts, but a holiness whose first character is to draw the heart into union with the Saviour.

This consecration is seen, first, in habitual trust and dependence. The Christian does not rest in his own goodness, or on grace already received. He relies on a strength which is not his own, and draws supplies from a fountain which is hidden above. He is a branch that lives only by abiding in the Vine; a member of the body, sustained and quickened by union

with Christ, the living Head. His holiness does not lead him to a proud independence, like the Pharisee ; but only draws him into fuller communion with the Lord himself, who is its source and fountain. His life is one of faith in the Son of God. Each step of grace leads him to a deeper conviction of his own weakness, and to rest his soul, more simply and entirely, on the mercy of the Lord. And thus, while spiritual pride separates us from Christ, the purity of the gospel only brings us nearer to him, in a deeper and more unreserved consecration. The words of the Apostle are then copied in the sinner's experience. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." "I am crucified with Christ ; nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

This consecration of the believer is marked, further, by his affections all centering in the person of the Saviour. He is spiritually espoused unto Christ. And now he learns to rise out of himself, and enters into the meaning of the words, "Ye are not your own ; ye are bought with a price." "They which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again." Thus the eyes of the believer wait on the Lord, "as the eyes of a maiden are unto the hand of her mistress." His affections are set on "the things above, where Christ is now seated at the right hand of God." Like the sun-flower, his face is turned ever towards the Sun of Righteousness. The work of Christ is the

ground of his hopes, the person of Christ the centre of his most earnest desires. Compared with the knowledge of the Saviour, all other things appear mean and empty. No figures are too worthless to describe them, when set in contrast with his divine glory. He is the hope of his people, and the object of their adoring love. Their heart longs for his approval, and their thoughts are fixed, with growing desire, on the hope of his appearing. Thus he purifies them unto himself; and when every jewel is drawn from the mine of nature, and polished by the discipline of his holy love, it becomes a part in that crown of glory which he bears in his own hand, and in that royal diadem which will encircle his brows for ever.

This consecration includes in it the image of Christ, imparted to the souls of his people. He purifies them unto himself, since he makes them like himself, and sees his own divine excellences reflected from them with a growing clearness. They are made holy, that they may represent to the world, however dimly, the holiness of their Lord, and hereafter the resemblance will be complete. They will be like him, for "they will see him as he is." Then it will be seen how truly He has purified them unto himself, when his meekness, and love, and grace, and wisdom, shine brightly in the children of God, as the sunlight in the countless dewdrops of the morning. This is the nearest and fullest consecration unto God, when every power of body

and soul images some ray of His divine perfections, and wears the stamp of His holy beauty.

Further, there is implied in this consecration, the deep and holy delight of the Lord in his ransomed people. He separates them to himself, as his joy and portion. "The Lord taketh pleasure in his people, and will beautify the meek with his salvation." "The Lord hath chosen Jacob to himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure." "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day that I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty." How full and various are these declarations of the delight which the Saviour has in his own servants! They are temples in the midst of which He dwells. They are a paradise of joy where He delights to walk, and to receive the fragrance of their prayers and the incense of their thanksgivings. They are the soldiers whom He marshals for victory, and the children whom He leads with a watchful and patient love. They are the bride whom He loves and cherishes; members of his sacred body, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all. By these various figures we are taught one common truth, that Christians become the portion of their Lord. When he purifies them, it is not for their own sake alone, but that his heart may rest on them, with unwearied and perpetual delight, through everlasting ages.

III. This divine consecration is followed by

another kindred feature—separation from the world. They are purified, as a *peculiar* people. Thus it was said of Israel, in Balaam's prophecy, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." A separate land, peculiar hopes, distinct ordinances and laws, fenced them off from all the Gentile nations of the world. So it is also, but in a deeper and more hidden sense, with believers in Christ. They mind heavenly things, and their conversation is in heaven. Their maxims are drawn from the word of Christ, and not from the usages of a vain and fallen world. Their hopes are not fixed on the fleeting shadows of time, but are anchored within the veil, and fixed on the glory to be manifested hereafter, when the Lord himself shall appear from heaven. And thus, being transformed in the spirit of their mind, they become a peculiar people, whom the world receives not, and will not acknowledge, but regards them as aliens.

This separation begins with the corruptions of the world. These the Christian will not be content to avoid ; he will hate and abhor them. He will not count the sins of others an occasion for boasting and merriment, but for sorrow and shame. He will be grieved for the transgressors, when they openly cast the words of God behind them. And the more the work of grace advances in his heart, the more complete this separation will become, and he will copy more nearly the experience of the Psalmist, when he declared with a bleeding heart—"Rivers of

water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law."

But this separation will reach also to the subtle maxims of worldliness. The Christian will renounce these and cast them away. Men of the world will praise him when he does well for himself. But he will hate and abhor in himself the deepest prudence, in which the honour of his Lord is forgotten. The spirit of the world is one of vain flattery: he will seek to be a faithful witness of the truth. The temper of the world is one of contented and selfish avarice; he will seek ever for a single eye, and a bountiful heart of love. The maxims of the world and its fashions will have no weight with him, wherever they shrink from the one sure touchstone, the word of the living God. He knows that there is an atmosphere of delusion around him, and he strives ever to be on his guard, and with the lamp of that blessed word, to guide his steps in the ways of Christ, though a thousand flattering by-paths, strewn with the flowers of worldly pleasure, were to open temptingly before him. The men of the world may count him a fool or a madman; but it is a small thing in his eyes to endure their censure; for his appeal is to a higher judgment, where the maxims of the world, its pride and selfishness, will be unmasked in their true vileness, and condemned for ever.

IV. Another fruit of this divine gift, in the death of our Lord, is the mutual communion of all true believers. His design of love was to purify them unto himself, as *a people*. They

are to be linked closely with each other, no less than with the Lord himself, who is their prophet and their king. They are not a scattered and disunited multitude, but a people knit together by a sevenfold union. There is one body, and one spirit, and they are called with one hope of their calling. They have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, whose presence sheds life and joy through all the companies of the redeemed. The body of Christ has joints and bands, by which the divine nourishment is supplied to it. The whole course of God's Providence here is a secret preparation of his children for their eternal union. All the friendships, the societies, the links of Christian affection below, are the seed of a glorious harvest, the nursery of spiritual affections, the sources of a mysterious union, that will last for ever. As the stones of the temple were hewn in the mountains, before they were fitted each to its own place in the glorious building; as the vessels of the temple were cast in the plains of Jordan amidst the miry clay, before they were placed in due order in those courts of the Lord; so will it be with the spiritual stones of the nobler temple of heaven, and the vessels of honour and glory, who shall for ever be filled with the grace and loving kindness of the Lord. There is nothing loose nor disjointed in the union of the people of God. Each has his own gifts, and his own place for their exercise, assigned him. Each has his own rank and place in the communion of the redeemed, and links of

special union with those who shall be nearest to them in the kingdom of God. All members have not the same office ; and all the true Israel of God do not belong to the same tribe. The variety, the order of the works of nature, must reappear in the works of grace and in the kingdom of glory. And this will add one element of deeper interest to the happiness of heaven. It is a rest which remaineth for *the people* of God. Star will differ from star in glory. There will be all the varied gradations of an earthly kingdom, but love, deep and everlasting, will shed its light over the whole. There will be no pride in those whose glory is the brightest, for a deeper humility is one main element in that superior brightness. There will be no envy in the least and lowest ; for, though the vessel may be smaller, free and undeserved grace will have filled it, even to overflowing, with happiness and thanksgiving. Christ will have purified unto himself a people, various in their gifts, but united in perfect love ; diverse in their ranks amidst the heavenly company, but all blending in one sweet harmony of everlasting and immortal praise.

This truth should supply a motive, even now, for mutual forbearance and honour among the children of God. It is not the purpose of their Lord that all should be moulded precisely in the same form. There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. The eye has not the office of the ear, nor the hand the province of the eye. As in an earthly kingdom there are manifold

varieties of trade, of rank, and of talent, so has the Lord purposed in the work of redemption. It is *a people* that he designs to purify, and each is to reflect some aspect of the Divine goodness, which no other Christian, amidst all the myriads of the saved, will reflect with the same brightness. Here is a motive for deep forbearance upon earth, and here also will be a spring of mutual honour and delight through the ages of eternity.

V. The last effect of the gospel which is here described, as flowing from the gift of the Saviour, is the practical zeal and devotedness of His people in all works of love and holiness. He gave himself, to purify a peculiar people, *zealous of good works*.

The order itself conveys to us an important lesson. Zeal for good works can only spring from a heart that is purified by the love of Christ. The tree must first be made good, and then the fruits will be good also. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." It is vain to look for the outward triumphs of the gospel, till the souls of men are brought under its secret power. The fountain must be cleansed, that the streams in the life of the sinner may become pure. Doctrine must go before all right practice; and only those who have known and felt the love of Christ within will delight in fulfilling the commands of the Saviour, or devote themselves aright to the service of their brethren.

But these words of the Holy Spirit teach us

many other lessons. They remind us, first, that true religion is a practical thing. The gift of God's love is not to be in vain. Its fruits are to be seen in all the walks of Christian obedience. The faith to which it leads, does not say, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; it quickens the charities of this life, and fills the heart with real and hearty desire for the good of others. Our blessed Lord gave himself for his people, that he might make them like himself. And His was no course of mere contemplation, but one of unwearied labour for the good of souls. Such also, though in various measures, according to their faithfulness and obedience, all his people become. They are known by their fruits, love to God and love to man, guiding their steps, quickening their prayers, and animating their lives. St. Paul presents to us this very test of the more abundant grace bestowed upon him—"I laboured more abundantly than they all." And wherever the full power of the gospel is known, its effects will be the same. The dying love of Christ will stir up every power and awaken every energy of the heart, to glorify him who has suffered for us in agony, and bought us with his own blood.

Again, the works of the true Christian are here contrasted with those of the worldling. They are good works in which he is to be occupied. They must spring from living faith in Christ. They must have for their aim the glory of God, and not the honour which cometh from men. They must minister to the real

wants of our fellow sinners, and not to their diseased and sinful appetites, nor yet to the spiritual pride of him who performs them. They are equally removed from the heartless rigour of the ascetic, and the vain flatteries of the worldly. They are to bear the resemblance of Him, in whose works holiness and mercy were always blended, and zeal for the glory of God mingled with a tender compassion for human weakness. Such are to be the works of the real Christian, thoughts and efforts and labours of love, both for the bodies and the souls of his suffering fellow-sinners. This is the very purpose for which God has called him to Himself. He is a noble piece of Divine workmanship, and is "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that he should walk in them."

Further, the Christian, in these works of love, is to be earnest and zealous. He has the most powerful motives to quicken him in the service of his Master and Lord. He knows that the doom of the unprofitable servant is to be cast into the outer darkness. He is told that even a cup of cold water given in faith, the slightest act of true Christian charity, shall in no wise lose its reward. And there are other motives still higher, into which no suspicion of mere selfishness can enter. He has the example of boundless love full in his view. He has the gracious exhortation of his Lord in his ears, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." He has the brightness of heaven before him, and around

him a world of perishing sinners, and within his reach a message of infinite power to save, and a balm that can heal the worst diseases of the soul. He has the promise of the Spirit to sustain him in every duty, and the presence of his Lord to cheer him in every work of love, by his approving and gracious smile. With such motives, his zeal must grow stronger and brighter. The more prompt and full his obedience, the more delightful does the service of Christ become. Every act of kindness and love gives him a fresh hold on the promises of God, and renews his strength for fresh efforts and more abundant labours. And above all, the view of God's unspeakable gift in the death of Christ, and the prospect of His return, fill his soul with wonder and admiration, and quicken him into a holy ardour to glorify Him who has loved him and bought him with His own blood, and made him a king and priest unto God for ever.

These words remind us further, that the heart of the Saviour is bent on this great object, the devoted zeal of his followers. That they might be zealous of good words, was his very purpose in dying for them. Here surely is a motive of the deepest power. This was His design when in agony in the garden, and when He was nailed to the cross. Our zeal was the very end of those bitter sufferings. It is in the zealous labours of his people that He sees the travail of his soul, and rejoices with holy gladness. When we are lukewarm in his service,

cold and indolent in works of mercy, we so far do violence to his love. We then run counter to the gracious design of his sufferings, and make his death, so far, to be in vain. "Herein," he declares to us, "is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples."

Such then, my brethren, is the true design of the gospel and of our blessed Lord in offering himself a sacrifice for our sins. It was not to encourage us in careless unconcern, nor to soothe us with the fancy that all will surely be well at the last. No, it was to awaken us from the dreams of the world, from the power and bondage of our sins. It was to free us from every taint of corruption, and take away all iniquity from our souls. It is sent to us, that it may purify our hearts by the knowledge of the Saviour, that it may melt us into repentance by the sight of his cross, and quicken us into obedience by the example of his holiness. Its divine purpose is to draw our hearts into near and close communion with our risen Saviour, that our whole trust may be reposed in his work of redeeming mercy, and all our affections may centre upon Him, as the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely. Wherever this gospel is received, it separates the heart from the corruption of the world and its subtle maxims of selfishness, and knits the soul in delightful fellowship of love with all the servants of God. Its fruits do not and cannot remain hidden in the heart. They appear in the life ; they mould the conversation, and stir up a hearty and earnest

zeal for the glory of God and the highest welfare and happiness of our fellow men. These are fruits which the Saviour looks for in his redeemed people; and, to secure this blessed change in their hearts and lives, he was content to come down from heaven, and to bear the curse in deep and bitter agony. He gave himself for us, to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Let us then examine ourselves by the test which these words supply. Are these the effects of the gospel in our own case? Has this purpose of a Saviour's love been fulfilled in our experience? Or are we like those who crucify him afresh by their sins, and put him to open shame? It is a grievous curse to be under the sound of the gospel, and dead to its power; to hear continually of the dying love of the Saviour, and yet to be rebelling against the great purpose for which he died. Where the work of love on his part is so wondrous, the works of gratitude on our part should correspond to its greatness. A motive so vast and so glorious cannot be set before us in vain. If it do not quicken us, it will kill; if it do not save and renew our souls, it must bring them under a tenfold ruin. O may each of us lay to heart the solemn results of a neglected gospel. May the gift of God be ever before our eyes, in all the riches of wisdom, the fulness of grace, and the depth of compassion which it reveals, and then our hearts and lives will bear witness to its power. Purity and heavenly-mindedness, zeal and love,

will daily increase and abound in us, till at the great day, when the Lord shall appear, his work of grace shall be complete, and He will present us, with the multitude of his saints, faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

SERMON VII.

1 CORINTHIANS I. 18.

FOR THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS IS TO THEM THAT
PERISH FOOLISHNESS; BUT UNTO US WHICH ARE SAVED,
IT IS THE POWER OF GOD.

WHEN we reflect on the nature of the gospel, and the gift of Divine love which it reveals, we may naturally be lost in wonder, and overwhelmed with its greatness. That the Creator of all worlds should become a creature; that He whom angels worshipped should stoop to be the by-word of the scorner; and the King of kings, for the sake of guilty rebels, who mocked and despised him, should be nailed to the cross, are truths so wonderful that they may well dazzle us by their brightness. A salvation so great and so precious, we might conceive, would bow every child of man into gratitude and obedience; and a hope so bright and glorious attract every heart from the love of sin to the service of the living God. If the everlasting Son, our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, has given himself for us, then surely wherever the

message comes, there will be unmingled gladness and devout thanksgiving. But here the word of God steps in, to preserve us from error, and gives us a juster view of the real fruits we may look for where the message of love is proclaimed. The grace of Christ is indeed great and wonderful above all things; but then the hearts of those who hear the glad tidings are deceitful above all things, yes, and desperately wicked. There is thus a mingled effect from the preaching of God's word. Its power to subdue the souls of men is great and wonderful, but great and wonderful also are the hindrances to be overcome. The truth in itself is unspeakably bright and glorious, but when it shines in the thick darkness of the world, its light is often obscured, and its true glory is hidden from the view. There are some who embrace it, and others who reject it. To some the message is a savour of life unto life; but to others, of death unto death. Sometimes it is received, but sometimes it is rejected; and its effects are opposite on those who reject and receive it. We must not be surprised, however we may grieve, that where the gospel has been proclaimed for years, too many continue careless as ever, and the fruits seem very small, when compared with the glory of the glad tidings themselves. The secret cause is given us in the striking words of St. Paul, which mark out the two classes of hearers, and the opposite doom that awaits them: "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God."

Let us enter seriously upon this great subject, and remember that it involves our salvation. May the Holy Spirit fill us with a deep and sacred reverence, while we consider, first, the doctrine to be proclaimed; next, the opposite treatment it receives; and, finally, the opposite end of those who neglect or who embrace it.

I. The doctrine to be proclaimed is here called "the preaching of the cross." The words do not mean, as might appear at first sight, the ordinance of preaching, as a means of grace, but the truth itself which forms the substance of the message. It is the good news, the glad tidings of joy, which are given to the heralds of the gospel to proclaim. Viewed in this light, the words suggest to us four main lessons; the sin and ruin implied,—the way of salvation by a crucified Saviour,—the special importance of this doctrine,—and the duty of publicly proclaiming it for the salvation of man.

The words of the Apostle imply our sin and ruin. There would have been no need for the Son of God to be crucified, and no meaning in this doctrine of the cross, unless man had fallen, and the curse of God were hanging over him. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." We are reminded, then, by the very message of pardon, how deep our ruin has been. There would have been no atoning sacrifice, if there had not been a world of sin for which to atone; and it is because we have all gone astray like lost sheep, that God hath laid the iniquity of us all upon his beloved Son. We

cannot look on the wonderful nature of the remedy without perceiving the desperate nature of the disease. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." All have gone aside, and together have become abominable in the sight of our Maker. Our very righteousness, and our best and most hopeful offerings, by nature, are like filthy rags in the sight of Infinite Holiness. The heart a cage of corruptions, the eyes blind, the ears deaf, to the word of God; the understanding darkened, the soul a captive in bondage, and sold under sin; such is the true and faithful description of our natural state in the word of God. From this rock of stony hardness, the gospel is sent to hew us; out of this pit of foul corruption it has to deliver us. Never shall we feel or prize the cross of the Saviour, till we have known the ruin of the sinner, and that horrible pit of eternal and hopeless misery from which we need to be raised.

✠ Such is the truth implied in these words. To sinners thus lost and fallen, they speak with a voice of comfort, and reveal the sure and only way of salvation. That way is faith in a crucified Saviour, the proclamation of the cross. How simple, and yet how amazing is the truth. The Lord God Almighty beheld us perishing in our sins, and himself has found a ransom. The words of Abraham have been gloriously fulfilled—"God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." The Word, the Eternal Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, has

been made flesh, and has dwelt among us. He for our sakes came down from heaven, and was born of the Virgin. For our sakes he sojourned thirty-three years in this lower world, and preached the glad tidings of mercy by the sea of Galilee and in the streets of Jerusalem. For us he fulfilled all righteousness, that he might be a perfect example, and also become a pure and spotless offering. For our sakes, finally, he laid down his life, and died in agony. He became our Passover, to redeem us from the angel of vengeance, and was sacrificed for us. "He was made sin for us, though he knew no sin." The iniquity of all the world was made to meet upon him, and he alone sustained the fearful and tremendous burden. "He hath redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us." He "hid not his face from shame and spitting," that we might be rescued from shame and everlasting contempt. Our curse was laid upon him, our sins were all charged to his account; "he bare them in his own body on the tree, and by his stripes we are healed." O how wonderful is this message of the cross; a wonder "that even angels desire to look into." He took our nature upon him, that he might really be one with all mankind, the new head of our lost race; and that justice might have a real ground to visit the curse upon him. But since mere justice still could not have claimed it from the Holy One, his free grace supplied the rest. He was willing to be offered, yea, he delighted to become the true offering for sin; and justice

and grace met together, when the curse was visited on his head. It was infinitely just, for he was the second Adam, one with a world of sinners; it was infinitely gracious, for he was undefiled and sinless, the Holy One of God. Righteousness and peace embraced each other, and all the perfections of the Godhead were joined in eternal union. No shame was too deep, no agony too great, for his unspeakable love to endure. "He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This is the proclamation of mercy which God has made in the gospel. The Eternal Son of the Father has died for sinners, in agony and bitter shame; and now, through his cross, pardon, peace, and salvation are freely set before them. His words to them are simple and full—"Come, for all things are now ready." This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

But we learn further, from this text, the peculiar importance of this one doctrine, the cross of Christ, or the atonement made by a crucified Saviour. There were a thousand truths which St. Paul was commissioned to reveal; and there were duties most wide and various, which he was called to fulfil. He baptized, though, as he tells us, but seldom; and he administered the supper of the Lord. On the disciples at Ephesus he laid his hands, and they received the Holy Ghost. He planted churches and appointed elders over them. He gave directions on various social duties, marriages and law-suits, idol meats,

slavery and freedom, the provision for ministers, offerings for the poor, miracles and spiritual gifts, and the decent order of worship. He could unfold mysterious types in the histories of the law, and reveal prophecies both of coming evil and future glory. He was learned in all Jewish wisdom, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel; and he had been caught into Paradise, and heard unutterable things within the veil. Yet here he singles out one work as if it were his sole employment, and one truth as if it were the only truth he had to reveal. That doctrine was the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that work was the proclamation of the cross to perishing sinners. Here was the corner-stone of the whole system of truth, the centre and life of all the ordinances of the Church. Retain this foundation, keep this truth foremost in the view, and every other truth becomes a stream of life to the soul; and every other ordinance rich with eternal blessings. Cast aside this foundation, bury this truth, and hide it from the view of the Church, and every other doctrine becomes lifeless and barren, and the ordinances of God's house themselves a mockery and delusion. The key-stone is gone, and the arch falls to the ground, and crushes the sinner, in its fall, with the delusions of self-righteousness or the misery of hopeless despair. "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Doubtless to baptize was included in his commission, or the household of Stephanus would not have received the rite from his hands. But the inferior work was

obscured by the surpassing glory of the greater and more important, as stars disappear at the sunrise. The one was the triumphant artillery of the Divine war, to bring captive sinners to the obedience of Christ; the other was a sacred registry of the happy prisoners whom the power of the gospel had overcome, and vanquished with love.

Let us learn the important lesson which is here taught us. It is true that the message of the cross needs itself to be united with the hope of the promised kingdom, and both of these to be joined with the inward revelation of Christ in the soul. But still the Apostle shows us here which truth has to take the lead in the message of salvation. It must be the preaching or proclamation of the cross, before it can become a promise of the crown and the kingdom. Christ must first be seen, crucified for us, or his image will never be truly formed in the soul.

And this leads to one further remark which the words of the Apostle imply. This doctrine of the cross is not only the foundation of our faith, but there is a solemn call on the ministers of Christ to proclaim it only. It is not called simply the doctrine, but the proclamation of the cross. It is a truth which God would have to be published, as by the Apostle at Corinth, first of all, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. This is the gospel, which, "by the commandment of the everlasting God, is made known unto all nations for the obedience of faith." True, many may despise, and many

pervert the message ; ungodly men, as of old, will “ turn the grace of God itself into lasciviousness.” It will needs be that offences come, and the doctrine of the cross itself may be to many “ a savour of death unto death.” But still the commandment remains binding on the servants of Christ. It is the covenant of the everlasting God, and is itself everlasting. While there is one sinner perishing for lack of knowledge, this love of God in Christ, and this atonement through his blood, is to be freely proclaimed. Solemn, indeed, are the sanctions that attend it, and deep is the reverence with which Christ should be proclaimed by the heralds of Christ, and received by his people. But to withhold it, is rebellion against the command of God, and hateful fraud on the souls of men. This would be nothing less than to seal up the fountain which God himself has opened for sin and uncleanness, and to forbid the guilty to be cleansed in its healing streams. No, the cross is not merely a holy truth ; it is, and must continue, a Divine proclamation. It is proclaimed by prophets : “ Ho, every one that thirsteth.” “ The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” It is proclaimed by the Lord’s forerunner : “ Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.” And the proclamation is continued with growing clearness, from inspired apostles, to Jews in their unbelief, and heathen in their foul idolatry. “ Be it known that by this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” “ Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and

thou shalt be saved." Here on the cross, the fountain of life is opened, and "the Spirit and the bride say, come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

II. Let us now turn to the next lesson conveyed in these words—the two opposite ways in which God's message is received. Here is the secret of the contrast between the glory of the truth, and the scanty and poor effects which too often it produces. There are many to whom it is foolishness; there are some only who receive it into their hearts, and to whom it becomes truly "the power of God unto salvation."

Here, my brethren, is the parting of the two roads—to heaven and to hell. Here are involved the weighty issues of life or death eternal. Just as you welcome or despise this message, your character will be fixed here, and your state for ever. If the preaching of the cross be foolishness to you, you are perishing; if you find it "the power of God to your souls," you are among those who will be saved in the day of Christ. How needful then to search narrowly, and examine which of these characters applies to ourselves.

When is the preaching of the cross foolishness to us? When we are heedless and heartless under the sound of the gospel; when we trust in our own goodness for acceptance with God, and when we practically disown the truth by a life of worldliness.

The preaching of the cross is foolishness to all those who are heedless under the sound of the

gospel. The message itself is great, wonderful, and glorious. It is one which angels themselves desire to look into. Its source is in the everlasting counsel of God, before the worlds were made. Its purpose is to impart eternal glory to perishing sinners. The means by which the blessing is procured, are the descent from heaven of God's co-equal Son, the mystery of the incarnation, his agony, and shame, and bloody death. The messengers employed in the work are not only prophets and apostles, but holy angels, and the blessed Spirit of God. The truths are wonderful, the grace unsearchable, the glory to which it would bring us vast and unspeakable. Now if we hear this message without thought or interest: if we are sleepy and careless, stupid and unconcerned, when these truths are set before us, then plainly the preaching of the cross to us is foolishness. We can never have seen the riches of God's grace, which it reveals, nor the wisdom of this Divine plan of salvation. We must think it something that we can well spare, and be happy without it. What folly then for such a sacrifice to be made! What a waste of suffering on the part of the Son of God! What needless cruelty on the part of his Heavenly Father! What an affront do sinners put on the glorious attribute of God's wisdom, when they treat the gospel with cold unconcern, as a superfluous gift, which they may spare with little or no loss! Hence they hear it without one emotion of love, without one pang of fear, without one pulse of gratitude, or one utterance of praise. It falls on

their ears like sweet music upon the dead. They have no eye for its beauty, no ear for the rich melody of love it contains. It is foolishness to them ; for their hearts are carnal, sold under sin ; and the doctrine of the cross must be spiritually discerned. To the ungodly, a crucified Saviour has no form or comeliness. But they who believe can behold his glory in his sufferings, " the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The preaching of the cross, again, is foolishness to all those who rely on their own goodness. Many there are who build up a righteousness for themselves. They are very religious in their own way. Their attendance on God's house, or their honesty in trade, their religious orthodoxy, or their rigid observance of times and seasons, their prayers and alms, or their fasts and penances, build up for them a stock of merit, on which they rely. Hence, in their system or creed, the atonement scarcely finds a place. They leave it there, because their orthodoxy requires it ; not because their souls cleave to it, or feel the need of it for their own wants. It is a venerable ruin of antiquity, which they like because it is old, and gaze upon at a distance ; but not the temple of their heart, in which they offer up their daily worship. Now to these, the preaching of the cross must be foolishness. They despise it as needless, and they dislike it as dangerous. It is so easily open to perversion, that they think it best hidden ; it is so fatal to their own confidence, that they dread its near approach.

They practically rest on their own moral uprightness, their soundness in the profession of a true creed, or their strictness in ceremonies and rites enjoined or practised in the Church. If such be the religion God requires, why did the Son of God come down from heaven? If his work may be put out of sight without loss, or even with benefit, why did he come to suffer, and why did angels sing their anthems at his birth? Can God have become incarnate, and the incarnate God have died for sin, and must not all other means of life, apart from this truth, seem empty and worthless? Yes, if the trust of the self-righteous be well-founded, and the cross of Christ may be spared from the scheme of salvation, then Christ has died in vain. Then,—be it spoken with reverence, for it is a solemn and weighty truth,—the death of Christ on the cross is the greatest of all follies: and “when it pleased the Father to bruise him, and to put him to grief,” it was only an act of frightful and astounding cruelty. Think, then, self-righteous sinner, of the guilt which lies upon you. When you set aside the work of Christ, and his death on the cross, and lean on another confidence, you are guilty of the worst and foulest blasphemy against the living God. You charge Him, who is the only wise, with infinite folly; and condemn in your hearts the God of all grace, whose name is Love, as guilty of cruelty beyond all example, and delighting in blood. How awful must your guilt appear in the eyes of his holiness, while you thus, by the pride of

your hearts, blaspheme the highest act of his love, and turn the most wonderful triumph of his grace into a foul affront on all his attributes of goodness !

Further, this same preaching is also foolishness to those who deny its power by a life of worldliness and sin. There may be a seeming attention to the gospel, and a form of sound doctrine retained, and still the power may be wanting. No fruits of living holiness may follow the message. The phrases of the lips may be sound, the mercy and love of Christ the professed foundation of hope, and still the profession may be dry and sapless. Selfishness may still prevail. Covetousness may still rule in the heart. The pleasures of sin may still be dearly cherished ; and the glory of the Saviour be set aside in the whole spirit of the heart, and the whole course of the life. Here too the preaching of the cross is counted folly. The Lord has given himself for us, "to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." He died for us, "that he might be Lord of the dead and the living, and that we should not henceforth live to ourselves, but to him that died for us." It would have been a strange and monstrous folly for the Son of God to have stooped so low, and suffered so deeply and bitterly, if no fruits were to follow from this travail of his soul. But he had a great and worthy end in view. The joy set before him, for which he endured the cross, was the holy happiness, the eternal glory, of ten thousand times ten thousand ransomed sinners. These

are the crown of glory, and the royal diadem, which adorn the triumphant Sufferer, as the purchase of his blood, the travail of his soul, and the fruits of his agony and death. But you, who hear the gospel, and continue worldly still, frustrate for yourselves the whole purpose of his death. So far as yourselves are concerned, he hath died in vain. There is the fountain open, but you are uncleansed. There is the ransom found, but you choose to remain in bondage. There is the message of freedom, but you prefer the chains of sin. There is the crown of glory presented, but you put it away, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life. Hence to you the preaching of the cross is foolishness. It produces no effect on your soul answering at all to its own greatness. It is made to you like a medicine that does not cure, like a ransom that will not set free, a portion that does not satisfy, a motive that will not move, a gift that drops from the hand of the Giver, because no other is held out to receive it. How fearful then must be your guilt, and how solemn the account you must render hereafter for such abuse of the gospel !

But there are some to whom an opposite character applies. The doctrine of the cross, to them, is no idle tale ; it is the very power of God to their souls. How may we learn whether this be our own state ? If the preaching of the cross be indeed the power of God to ourselves, the three opposite characters to those before given must meet in our experience. And first,

we must be wakeful and prayerful hearers of the word. Wherever the truth comes in its Divine power, the ear will be open to receive it. The attention will be awake, the soul will be in earnest. We shall hear the word, as hearing for eternity. We shall adopt, but with a purer and deeper feeling, the true witness of the Pythoness, and apply it to the preachers of God's word—"These men are the servants of the Most High God, who show unto us the way of salvation." We shall lose and forget the messenger in the greatness and glory of the message. We shall lift up our hearts in prayer, that God would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, to know what is the hope of our calling, and what are the wonders of that cross on which our hopes for eternity must rest. The description in Ezra will apply to us, when, "the ears of all the people were very attentive to the words of the law." No sleepy eyes, no drowsy hearts, no forgetful ears, no treacherous memories; but every faculty awake, and tasked to its full power, to receive those treasures of the word of grace, which are "able to make us wise unto salvation."

Again, where the gospel is the power of God, there will be an utter renouncing of all self-trust. We shall see that so wonderful a gift as the Eternal Son of God dying for sinners, shuts out every other hope as folly and madness. How should our works fulfil for us that deliverance from wrath, which needed the agonies of the everlasting King? How should our penances

blot out those sins which drew the bitter cry from the Son of God, when expiring on the tree? Where this truth is revealed in its power, even the needful steps and means of grace in the heart sink into comparative littleness. They are needful, but they are needful mainly as the links which lead us to the Saviour. They are beautiful and lovely, but they are chiefly, nay, only beautiful, because they reflect and receive the infinite loveliness of the Son of God. Even the real work of the Spirit in the believer, though heavenly and divine, is like a star that disappears when brought near to the glory of the Sun of Righteousness. And if it be so with the living holiness of the saint, how much more with the vain confidences of the sinner! How empty, how miserable, the patchwork of his selfish service—his impure and polluted offerings, when placed in the room of this complete atonement, these infinite agonies of the Lord, as the peace-offering to reconcile him unto God! Therefore, when the gospel comes with power to the heart, all these vain pretences must utterly cease. The things in which the sinner once boasted, he now, with the Apostle, counts to be dross, and dung, and emptiness; and his one desire is to be found in Christ, and to be clothed with his righteousness which is complete, spotless, and divine.

Again, where the doctrine of the cross comes in its power, the fruits of holiness will abound in the life of the Christian. For this is the great end for which the message is sent. It is to

purify our souls, and render us a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Wherever its power is felt, these blessed effects must ensue. The inquiry will at once rise in the heart—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done to me?" Every fresh view of the Saviour's cross will open a fresh stream of zeal and love in the heart, as when the flinty rock was smitten by the rod of Moses. There will be love to him who has first loved us. There will be joy and peace through believing in his grace. There will be gentleness and meekness, the Divine reflection caught from His glory, who was meek and lowly in heart. The attractive power of the cross will be felt, as our Lord himself proclaimed it, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Then the soul will be drawn under the full influence of his dying love. There will be a deeper reverence and a holier joy. There will be a more burning hatred of sin, and a more fervent longing after holiness. There will be a continual and ceaseless progress in all heavenly grace, and the more we become like the Saviour, the more powerful the attraction of his love will be on our souls. Drinking in life from his wounds, and light from his presence, we shall reflect more of his Divine beauty, and glorify more abundantly his holy name. The words of the same Apostle will thus be fulfilled—"We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by

the Spirit of the Lord." Then indeed the preaching of the cross is the power of God, when, in every family and in every heart, the joyful sound of salvation by the blood of Christ is followed by these abounding fruits of the Spirit; and the command of God by the prophet is fulfilled—"Let judgment run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty and flowing stream." Blessed are the people who thus hear the joyful sound; they shall walk in the light of God's holy countenance, and be brought safely to the presence of his glory.

III. But this leads us to the last truth suggested by the text, and on which a few words will be sufficient, the two opposite issues to those who reject the gospel and to those who embrace and honour it.

The preaching of the cross is foolishness *to them that perish*. Solemn and startling message! Wherever the doctrine of the cross is accounted foolishness, there the soul is perishing already, and in danger of perishing for ever.

It is perishing even now. The word bears exactly this sense. The statement is not merely, that they will perish hereafter: they are perishing even now. The blight of sin is eating into them daily: the canker-worm of corruption is wasting their souls. Their affections are blighted with selfishness and vanity. Their understanding is darkened with the love of sin, with pride and unbelief. Their heart is tied and bound with the cords of their iniquity. The poison of the old serpent is rankling in their veins. They

are perishing even now. They need no thunderbolt to consume them: they need no fiery judgment to render them miserable. "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." "They shall eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices." "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." The waster is already within, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Yes, they are perishing, dead to the highest pleasures, blind to the purest joys, seared against the most tender affections; like withered trees, twice dead, and plucked up by the roots, without life, and without love, without peace or joy or holiness.

They are in danger also of perishing for ever. Sin left to its own course would make them miserable and wretched. But there are threatenings of Divine justice which stand in broad relief against them. "He that believeth not the Son of God shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." When the Lord Jesus appears, it will be "in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." Here is the fearful doom that is in store against them. They account the preaching of the cross to be foolishness. But then the folly will be seen to be their own, who have perverted the highest triumph of God's wisdom and love into their own heavier condemnation. They have despised the goodness of God, and poured contempt on the richest gift of his grace, and

shame and everlasting contempt will be their portion.

But how different will be the lot of those who receive the gospel in faith, and to whom the doctrine of the cross is the power of God. They are the saved ones of the Lord. A Divine power is at work within them, moulding their hearts into the image of the Saviour. A Divine life is imparted to them by God's Spirit, which is incorruptible and abides for ever. They have passed from death to life. They have the earnestness of eternal life in their souls. And how blessed even those earnestness ! love and joy, peace and gladness, zeal and humility, the dignity of holiness, the tenderness of compassion and grace. The beauty of the Lord their Saviour is beginning to be upon them, and it will abide on them for ever. The light of His countenance has begun to shine on them, and their souls shall rejoice in that light, as it grows still clearer, brighter, and more joyful, for evermore.

Their salvation is now begun ; hereafter it will be complete in the kingdom of their Lord. Grace is the seed of glory. They sow to the Spirit, and of the Spirit they shall reap life everlasting. They have listened to the message of grace here on earth ; and sounds of joy, which ear hath not heard, shall greet them for ever in Paradise. They have renounced their own righteousness at the foot of the cross ; and the Lord shall be their everlasting righteousness, and their light through eternal ages. They have known the gospel as the power of God, in renewing

their souls ; and they shall find its power revealed with still deeper wonders of love, in millions of immortal souls, made perfect in holiness, who shall be their companions for ever. "Blessed are the people who are in such a case," who know the cross here on earth as the power of God ; for they shall walk in the light of a Saviour's love through all the changes and the shadows of time, and shall dwell at the last under the shadow of Almighty power, and be embraced by the arms of everlasting love, in the kingdom of God and the Lamb for ever and ever !

SERMON VIII.

2 PETER I. 5.

AND BESIDES THIS, GIVING ALL DILIGENCE, ADD TO YOUR FAITH, VIRTUE; AND TO VIRTUE, KNOWLEDGE; AND TO KNOWLEDGE, TEMPERANCE; AND TO TEMPERANCE, PATIENCE; AND TO PATIENCE, GODLINESS; AND TO GODLINESS, BROTHERLY KINDNESS; AND TO BROTHERLY KINDNESS, CHARITY.

THE gospel of Christ, wherever it comes, separates men into two classes. Some reject or despise it, others welcome it with the heart. This contrast, at first, is dim and faint, but it grows deeper continually. The believer is always advancing in holiness and preparing for glory; the unbeliever is sinking lower in sin and ruin. We have already dwelt on the opposite way in which the gospel is received. Let us now, from these words, consider the progress of those who heartily embrace it, the graces which they are to acquire, and the happy issue of their journey. We shall thus be helped in that most weighty inquiry, whether we ourselves

are in the way of peace and holiness, and what advances we have made, or are now making, in our journey to the kingdom of God.

The words of the text, when rightly explained, set before us two main lessons; the strong motives which the promises of God supply for Christian diligence, and the progress of Divine grace in the heart of real believers. May the Holy Spirit of God apply both of them to our souls in their most practical form.

I. First, these words teach us the motives for Christian diligence supplied to us in the promises of God. Their exact meaning might be expressed as follows—‘And for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue.’ The Apostle is not giving a second exhortation, independent of his former words. He is rather deriving a great lesson of practical holiness from the fulness of the Divine promises. His reasoning is of this kind, ‘The Divine power of God is on your side. All helps are freely given to you for the Divine life. You are called to glory and virtue. You have in the Lord Jesus a perfect example, and the knowledge of his love is enough to stimulate you in your course. The promises given to you are many; they are great; they are exceeding great and very precious. The express purpose for which they are given is to free you from lust and sin. And therefore, for this very reason, be diligent in your Christian course. Because you have so noble a calling, and such encouragement in the service of Christ, go boldly forward, and add grace to grace till

you obtain an abundant entrance in the everlasting kingdom of God.'

Such is the scope of St. Peter's words in this passage. How widely different from the view of the carnal heart, which always fancies that men can only be terrified into obedience, and that free promises are fatal to good works! But He who reads the heart, and knows what is in man, acts by a very different rule. He promises, that he may quicken us; he kindles hope first, that he may stir up the soul to earnest action. He is no taskmaster, to wring out reluctant services from bond slaves; but a Father of mercies, who delights to cheer his children onward in that service which He knows to be their real happiness, and which He would have them feel to be perfect freedom. Every where in His word the most stirring exhortations to holiness have their way prepared by the largest and fullest declarations of His infinite grace.

How then do the promises of God supply motives to Christian diligence? Why should they form the "very reason" assigned for our most devoted service. We may see this in four different lights. They are the source of hope, they are motives to fear, they awaken gratitude, and they open the most bright and joyful anticipation of coming reward.

The promises of God are a powerful motive to diligence, because they are a source of lively hope. Without hope, all labour is a weariness, and the least effort is a burden. If there were no ground to look for pardon, but the soul had

to wear the galling chain of doubt without any hope of deliverance, the springs of action would be dried up. We should then be ready to fold our arms and sit down in despair. Why should we be in earnest to labour, if all our toil may be useless? Why should we strive against sin, when its burden lies heavily and hopelessly upon us, after all our own efforts? Destroy hope, in any pursuit which men follow, and you stifle the very desire to labour. But open a sure prospect of success, and even the dull and sluggish are aroused to active exertion, and new life is infused into their souls.

Now so it is in the work of grace. The promises find the sinner laden with a curse, and the slave of corruption. He has no power for his own deliverance. His very services are sins, and add to his guilt. His efforts at payment only shew him the greatness of his debt, and increase its amount. The effort to move shews how strong are the chains of corruption that bind him to the earth. But those promises reveal to him a free pardon for the past, in the atoning blood of the Saviour. They reveal to him the gracious voice of God, saying to his conscience, "I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." They set before him the Holy Spirit, as his Strength and Comforter, who is able to overcome all this corruption, to deliver him from all temptations, and renew him in the image of Christ in true holiness. The same promises meet every want, and provide a balm for every trouble ; so that,

however various his fears and dangers, a full remedy, he sees, is already provided. "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done for you." And now hope is kindled in the soul. It is not vain to seek after God, for he is ready to multiply pardons. It is not vain to attempt to serve the Saviour: his grace is sufficient, and his strength is made perfect in weakness. Like the man whose hand was withered, the soul now makes the effort, and behold! the strength is supplied. Thus hope awakens exertion. The soldier will march gladly when all his wants are supplied, and he can rely on the skill of his captain. The stream will flow freely, when the fountain is supplied from the rivers of heaven. The birds will utter their songs of gladness, and fill the air with their lively melody, when the sunshine beams around them in the morning of spring. And so, too, when the light of God's promise dawns on the sinner's heart, his powers cannot but awaken from their slumber. The stream of affection in his heart will then be full. The song of praise will then issue, not from his lips only, but from his life also. Trusting in a Leader so gracious and so wise, he will move on boldly to the warfare against the enemies of his soul. The promises, far from leading him to sloth, will be the very reason of his earnest diligence. He will grudge to lose, by his own indolence, one drop of the blessing which they place full in his view; and will "press toward the mark, for that prize of his high calling" which is now set before him.

Thus, my brethren, should it be with yourselves. You cannot have seen the promises in their true light, if they do not quicken you in the service of Christ. The more you dwell on what your Lord is willing to do for you, the more will you be willing to do for him. Instead of saying wickedly, "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound," you will rather exclaim, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits which he hath done to me?" Every promise of the Saviour will open a fresh spring of hope to animate your zeal, and cheer you in all your labours.

But the promises of God are a further reason for diligence, as they supply a powerful motive for fear and reverence. Fear, standing alone, is indeed unable to secure diligence; but fear mingled with hope is a motive of uncommon power. Now this is one effect of the promises of God, when they are received in faith, as God reveals them. Forgiveness is, of all promised gifts, that which seems furthest removed from terror and alarms; and yet we are told, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." And how do God's promises awaken fear? Because they are joined with threatenings; and because they reveal mercies so wonderful, that the bare thought of losing them is terrible beyond expression. They are not given to assure us of blessings which the slothful and the heedless sinner shall enjoy. They are rich with mercies, but mercies strewed only in the path of repentance, faith, and obedience. They are


joined with the solemn warnings—"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "To whom much is given, of him shall much be required." They reveal to us pardon; but the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven. They teach us the mighty power of prayer; but still, "the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord;" and if we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us. They reveal to us great privileges of the baptized; but still all Israel were baptized, and God was not well pleased with them, and they fell in the wilderness. They teach us the blessedness of the gospel feast; "but he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." They tell us that the word of God is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among the saints in light; but those who "have tasted the good word of God, and fall away, it is impossible to renew again to repentance." In short, they set before us privileges which exalt us to heaven; but they remind us, that by the abuse and neglect of those mercies, we too, like Capernaum, may be cast down to hell. The soul is thus taught to serve with fear; and to rejoice with trembling; to see the danger of abusing the Divine bounty, and so to run in this heavenly race, as to obtain the crown of victory, and a full reward in the day of Christ.

Such is a further view of the Apostle's meaning. "For this very reason, give all diligence." Think how freely the blessings are offered, and

how fearful will be the danger of despising them. Think how great are the helps God has provided you, and then how inexcusable you will be, if you are found unholy and unbelieving at the last. Learn the greatness of the love of Christ, whence these promises flow, and then consider how hateful will be the sin, and how awful the judgment, if you requite that love with sin and ungodliness, without any zeal in his service or preparation for his coming. The treasure is vast; beware that you do not lose it by your unbelief. The prize is glorious—O fail not to attain it, and let not sloth and negligence rob you of that crown of glory. Who can have one glimpse of the inconceivable bliss of heaven, and not tremble at the thought of being shut out for ever, through his own neglect and unbelief?

The promises are also a powerful reason for diligence, as they awaken gratitude in the sinner's heart. Love is the mainspring of all true obedience. And this love must have its fountain in the love of Christ. "We love him because he first loved us." Now the promises are the mirrors in which only, or chiefly, that love can be seen. Through these the brightness of the grace of Christ dawns on the soul of the believer. What compassion does the repenting sinner see in those words of promise—"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out!" What mercy does the weary soul discover in the gracious invitation—"Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Every promise reflects, in a new light, the goodness of the Lord, and his

deep compassion to the guilty and the helpless. And hence the soul which gazes on them, drinks in love from the vision of God's love therein revealed. Each word of grace awakens a new response of holy affection. The dull heart shakes off its slumber, to behold that infinite and amazing love of Christ which encircles it around. And the words are thus fulfilled—"We love him because he first loved us." A new motive of action, the most powerful and strong, is thus infused into the renewed heart. "The love of Christ constraineth us." A deep sense of his dying agonies, and that love which once bled on the cross for sinners, and now reveals itself through the channel of a thousand promises, and reflects itself in every varied form of invitation and blessing, fills the spirit with wonder, and quickens it into praise, and will not suffer it to rest until every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. See the power of this motive in the great Apostle. He had seen the Lord Jesus in the way, and learned how deep was His love to the worst of His enemies. And what is the effect on his own soul? He can now break through the entreaties of his dearest friends, in the fervour of willing obedience. "What mean ye to weep and break mine heart? for I am willing not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." Yes, the promises of grace were exceeding great and precious in his view, and for this very reason he gave all diligence,



and pressed forward earnestly in the ways of Christ.

So will it be with us, my brethren, when the promises are heartily believed. They are openings, through which we gain so many glimpses of the unfathomable love of the Saviour. And every view of that love must kindle love in return, and quicken to obedience. It was not the servant that complained of a hard master, who traded with his talents. Mere constraint and fear will lead to no great sacrifices, to no earnestness of zeal. But where the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and the wide landscape of promise, like the land of Canaan to Moses, has been spread before the eyes, there every power of the soul will be attuned to praise, and nerved for obedience. The body will be presented a living sacrifice. The tongue will utter the praise of the Lord. The feet will run swiftly, and without weariness, in the ways of Christ, and in every path of holy obedience. We shall then give all diligence, and add grace to grace, knowing that the Master whom we serve is worthy of far more than all the offerings we can ever lay at his feet.

There is one further motive which the promises of God lend for our increased diligence, in the joyful anticipation they open to us of a full reward. The Apostle here sets it before us, in the words that follow—"For so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our God and Saviour."

There is a general hope which rests on the

free promise of pardon and grace in Christ, and which is needful for the very first steps in true and hearty obedience. But the promises supply to us far more than this general hope of forgiveness and mercy. They open a boundless prospect of glory in the world to come, and an everlasting kingdom prepared for the children of God. They also connect this glory with present faithfulness, and shew us various degrees of future blessedness, the fruit of present diligence in the cause of Christ. Even a cup of cold water shall in no wise lose its reward: "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." Grace in this life is the seed of glory; and peculiar diligence here is the pledge of peculiar glory hereafter. The apostles continued with our Lord in his temptations, and hence receive a special promise. There is the reward of a prophet, and there is the reward of a righteous man—"Whatsoever good thing a man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether bond or free." He who, by his diligence gained ten talents, received authority over ten cities; and he who gained five talents, over five. The rewards of glory are, and must be, in harmony with the works of nature and the gifts of grace; and all alike are to manifest the "many-varied wisdom of God."

Now here the precious promises are a powerful motive to give all diligence in the Christian life. O that we all could feel its power more deeply! Every hour has eternity folded in its wings.

Every action here lessens or increases the future recompense. Every thought, or word, or deed, is gold, silver, and precious stones, that will endure,—or stubble that will perish. In one, we sow to the flesh, and shall reap corruption; in the other, we sow to the Spirit, and reap life everlasting. And for this very reason we are bound to give—and when we believe them, we shall give—all diligence. They are talents with which we must trade. They assure us that every step of grace will make our crown of glory brighter; and every act of negligence and sin will abate its lustre. In the view of such promises, how should we redeem the time for God! How simply and entirely should we serve him who has redeemed us with his blood! How should we give diligence, nay, “all diligence, to make our calling and election sure!” The promises, then, of peculiar rewards for especial faithfulness, and increasing brightness of glory hereafter, the fruit of increasing variety of grace here below, are the very reason why every nerve should be strained, to add to faith virtue, and every other divine grace, that we may stand complete in all the will of God, and receive a full reward in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In all these ways, the promises of God’s word, so great and precious, stir up the zeal of the Christian. They encourage him with a sure hope of success. They teach him the solemn sanction under which he labours, and the fearful loss which negligence and sloth must ensure. They fill him with deep and fervent gratitude to

that Saviour, whose love shines in them so brightly ; while they open the glorious prospect of blessings without end and measure, and various degrees of glory, linked in with various degrees of grace, and high attainments to be won in the kingdom of God by patient and persevering zeal. If we really believe the promises, as God has declared them in his word, we cannot fail to be zealous in the Lord's service.

II. But this leads to the other main subject in these words,—the progress of divine grace in the heart of real believers. Grace is a living seed ; wherever it exists, it must grow. Those who have truly given their hearts unto God, must be advancing in the Christian life, and in the fruits of holiness. Their progress may be winding, often in the valley and in the deep, but still it is a real progress, and leads them by a right way to the city of God. Let us here consider the succession of Christian graces, as they are simply set before us by the Apostle himself, in the present verse.

The first in order of the graces to which we are exhorted, is faith. This is the foundation of the Christian life, and the link which binds the soul of the sinner to Christ himself, the only Saviour. It is faith which justifies us, and brings peace to the conscience. It is faith which overcometh the world, and works by love. It is faith by which the soul is freed from condemnation, and passes from death to life. And what is the nature of this faith, to which privileges so lofty and various are ascribed ? Viewed simply

in itself, it is believing the word of God. It is simply to credit the message which he sends to us. "He that believeth not, hath made God a liar." To believe, therefore, is simply to receive as true what God tells us. The virtue of faith depends altogether on the greatness, the power, and the beauty, of the truths which God has revealed. The glory of the message is reflected upon the souls of all who receive it. Faith in the words of men has no saving power, because the truths revealed are weak and earthly. But faith in the word of God has power to save us, because the love revealed in that word is so divine and wonderful, and the message brings eternity to bear upon the heart in all its solemn grandeur.

But these messages of God have two chief parts, commands, and promises. Faith has both of these for its object, and acquires thus a further and deeper meaning. A belief in the promises has for its direct fruit, affiance or trust; a belief in the commands, submission and allegiance. These graces are so closely blended with faith, that they may be viewed as essential to its very being. Hence in the Old Testament, trust is the name which it commonly bears, because this is the earliest fruit, and inseparable from its nature. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion." In the New Testament, again, we read of those who obey the truth; and the gospel is said to be made known "for the obedience of faith among all nations." Here we are equally taught that sub-

mission to the Divine word, and a true allegiance of the soul rendered to the authority of Christ, are part of that faith, by which the sinner is justified.

Such, then, is the faith here spoken of. It is a simple belief of whatever God tells us in his word, because his truth bears its own witness in the conscience, and He who reveals it cannot lie. This belief receives both the commands and the promises with equal submission. When it rests on the promises, it becomes a trust in God's mercy; when it receives his commands, it becomes a principle of settled allegiance to his sovereign will. This is the first step, the very foundation of the Christian life; for "he that believeth not, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth in him."

Here, too, must our diligence first be shewn. Works and ceremonies are all worthless, till our hearts have obeyed the charge of our Saviour, "Have faith in God"—"Believe in God, believe also in me." If the fountain be dried up, no streams can flow; and if our faith wither and decay, we shall look in vain for the fruits of righteousness. Study, then, to grow in faith. Read God's word. Meditate on His holy sayings. Pray for the Spirit to apply the truth with power to your heart. Leaven your soul daily with the great facts and doctrines of the gospel; and then, like the Thessalonians, your faith will grow exceedingly, and every other grace will flourish in its train.

But to faith we are to add virtue. The word

here denotes Christian courage. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." There is a temptation, even when we believe the truth, to hide it in our own bosom. In the first rise of deep and solemn feelings, it may seem unnatural to expose them to the eye of the world. It is the character of faith to look at the things unseen, and in its first stages it resembles its own objects, and the world cannot see it. But there is danger when the work of faith is hidden too much or too long. What was natural at first, becomes a sinful cowardice, when the time is come for an open confession of the truth. There may be various excuses that arise in the heart, to keep back from this duty. Sometimes, perhaps, the sacredness of the truths, which ought to be reserved with deep reverence, and hidden from profane eyes. Sometimes the delicacy of Christian feeling, that would be blighted by a rude exposure to others. Sometimes, again, Christian humility may be alleged, and our own unworthiness to take holy words into our lips. But all these may be, and often are, so many vain excuses for mere cowardice, and unwillingness to bear the reproach of Christ. To our faith, then, St. Paul warns us, we must add a holy courage. In the words of the service of baptism, we are not to be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, but are "manfully to fight under his banner, against the world, the flesh, and the devil." We must bear in mind that no religion will be owned of God,

in which God and his truth are not openly honoured before men. We must ponder that solemn saying of our Lord, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before the angels of God; but whosoever shall deny me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God." Having such threatenings written against the fearful, and such precious promises to the bold, let us add to our faith, courage; and while our religion has its root deep in the heart, in living righteousness with our mouth let us make confession unto salvation.

"And to virtue, or courage, knowledge." Even the zeal of young Christians is apt to mislead them. A false fire too often mingles with the flame of love, and defiles it. The Jews had a zeal for God, but not after knowledge; and it led them only into fatal and deadly sin. So in the first springing of the blade, and the earlier stages of vital religion, the same evil appears. There is a rashness and self-confidence which mars the beauty of holiness. There is a readiness to be employed in Christ's service, but much self-will in choosing the manner in which they would serve him. Some sacrifice of their own devising, some cross of their own making, is preferred to the simple, humble course of Christian duty. Hence often much trouble to themselves, and much scandal brought on the cause of Christ. Rebukes without meekness, censures without wisdom, a testimony against outward trifles rather than for great maxims of duty, will often hinder the whole effect of zeal,

and turn grace into wormwood. Such a fault we see in the two disciples—"Master, shall we call for fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, as Elias did." But Jesus rebuked them and said—"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." How often has such blind zeal, even in real Christians, impaired their own peace, disturbed families, and vexed grievously the churches of Christ!

Now as a remedy to these evils,—to virtue we must add knowledge. The words are more strictly,—in virtue exercise knowledge. Let your zeal itself be guided by heavenly wisdom. Seek for deeper insight into your own hearts, that you may not, like John, confound the fire of selfishness or vain glory with zeal for the Lord. Learn more of the love of Christ, that His bright example may preserve you from every false way. Gain a wider acquaintance with the doctrines of God's Word, in their wonderful harmony and contrast, that you may not distort the truth into narrow systems, and fight for your own contracted notions, as if you were champions of the truth itself. Learn the great lessons, in their seeming contrast and real harmony, of the freeness of grace and the obligations of holiness, the offering of the Saviour on the cross, and the glory of the Son of God in his coming kingdom. Thus, and thus only, your zeal will be freed from dangerous errors. There will be wisdom and love in your most faithful testimony, and tenderness and gentleness in your most zealous rebukes. The truth of God, known in its fulness, will

give a depth to your confession of Christ, which it could not otherwise attain, and faith and virtue, when crowned with this heavenly knowledge, will both of them shine with redoubled beauty.

“And to knowledge, temperance.” There is a kind of knowledge, which in practice is almost worthless. The truth may be received into the understanding, at least in a measure, while the heart is barred against its power. This is fully true in the unconverted, but in sincere converts it may prevail to a grievous extent. The knowledge of the Christian may greatly outstrip his practical attainments in holiness. Many truths may be clear to his understanding, which are scarce ever brought to bear on his conscience or life. This leads to most fatal evils. For as obsolete laws on the statute book tend to destroy the authority of all the rest, so this lifeless knowledge throws a blight even over those truths which are felt as well as known. Those who know only the simplest truths of the gospel and practise them, are more likely to be vigorous and healthy Christians, than those who have much deeper knowledge that lies unimproved. There is a deadening power over the conscience,—“For to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

In knowledge, then, we are further to practise temperance. Our insight into God’s word must lead to a real restraint of all evil tempers and passions. It must not be idle knowledge, but at work on the distempers of the heart. Every truth has its own province in the soul’s redemp-

tion, and each is to be applied to its own use, in curbing the passions and taming the desires of the soul. Are there rich mercies in God? They are to lead us to present our bodies a living sacrifice! Will the Lord appear in judgment? Then let us judge nothing before the time. Is the Lord at hand? Then let our moderation be known unto all men. Is it certain that we brought nothing into the world, and can carry nothing out? Then, having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. Is Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? Then let us not be carried about with divers and strange doctrines. Thus every part of Divine knowledge is to have an inward power. It must lead, not to mere speculation, but to practice also; and temperance and every form of willing self-sacrifice, are the fruits in which it should issue.

“And to temperance, patience.” The word, patience, here, as in many places, seems to denote perseverance. It is that patient continuance in well doing, which St. Paul describes by the same term. There may be vigorous fits of zeal and self-denial, followed by times of negligence and decay. Of many it may be said, as of the Galatians—“Ye did run well, who hath hindered you?” Your starting in the Christian race promised fair: whence this sudden and fearful declension? Like king Asa, who was diseased in his feet in his old age; after a time they seem to halt in their course of obedience; their faith is ready to fail. Their courage trembles, per-

haps even like Peter's, at the voice of a little maid. Their knowledge is clouded with doubt, or runs into the seed of vain speculations, till its power on the heart is lost and frittered away. Their temperance wastes itself in will-worship and austerities which God has not enjoined, while pride and bitterness and self-will grow undisturbed into a hateful luxuriance of evil. Hence, like Eli, they seem to fall backward, and run hazard of making shipwreck of their faith. To avoid this danger, to temperance we must add persevering patience. We must heed the warning—"He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. There is a Divine beauty in the steady, onward progress of the consistent and watchful Christian. Like Gideon, he may at times be faint, but always "he is pursuing." He follows on to know the Lord. No hindrances stay his course, no trials overwhelm his spirit. He seeks, by prayer, strength for each duty, and victory over each temptation, as they successively arise; and knowing that the fountain of grace is always full, he comes perpetually to drink fresh life and comfort and strength from its heavenly streams. His zeal is not fits and convulsions, but a healthy life. His course is not starts of sudden action, followed by sloth, but one stedfast race. His view of Christ is not hurried glimpses amidst days and weeks of contented darkness, but a continual gaze on the dying Lamb of God. And

thus to temperance he adds patience ; and every other grace receives a new beauty, when it shines, without flickering, with a full, steady, and unwavering flame of holiness.

“ And to patience, godliness.” Even the graces of the Christian may themselves become idols. His own inward experience or outward duties may be the objects in which his soul finds its rest. His thoughts may settle down in these, and seldom think of rising above his own circle, whether of inward contemplation, or of labour in the visible church. He may contract the range of his thoughts, and grow most selfish when he thinks himself a pattern of zeal. It is not enough then to persevere in the culture of heart, or the practice of outward duties. To this patience we must add godliness. In the routine of duty we must rise above it to him who has ordained it. In the culture of the soul we must raise our affections to Him, from whom only all grace and wisdom must flow. The soul must seek a direct communion with God himself. There must be the simple rest of the heart on a present Saviour. There must be a direct habit of reverence for the Almighty God. There must be a willing mind to forget the narrow round of our own duties as our portion, and to rise into the counsels of God which are from everlasting. Whatever bears on his glory must have a place in our heart. Every part of truth must be dear to us, because God has spoken it. Every act of zeal must be done, because God is honoured by it. We must rise above the mere

respect to our own happiness and safety, into a direct and pure regard to the glory of the Saviour. Like the living creatures in heaven, our eyes and our worship must be towards the throne of the Almighty, and our hearts present every service as a direct, though most unworthy tribute to the God of heaven.

“And to godliness, brotherly kindness.” The soul of man, in its highest attainments here, is still liable to sin. When the sons of God appeared before him, Satan presented himself among them. And when the Christian rises into the noblest enjoyments of true religion, temptation may still creep in. So godliness itself, the direct communion of the soul with the unseen God, may lead into danger. There is a mystical abstraction which unfits for plain and urgent duties. There is a kind of meditation in Divine things, which seems at first seraphic and heavenly, but where the blight and canker of a spiritual selfishness has crept in. There may be, as St. Paul warns the Corinthians, a searching out of all mysteries, and yet no love. Many will think it well to be on the mount of transfiguration with the Lord, who have neither faith nor love in readiness for the poor sufferers below. To godliness, then, we must add brotherly kindness. When we have risen to the Fountain of life, and filled our souls from those pure and living streams, we must return to diffuse them among our brethren, the people of God. Our faith must animate theirs. Our courage must stir up their hearts to holy bold-

ness ; that, like St. Paul at Rome, others also may become much more bold, when they observe our faithfulness in the cause of Christ. Our knowledge must not be locked up under the seal of spiritual pride, but our lips be as a well of life to refresh the souls of weaker Christians. Every gift is to be put out to usury, by being applied diligently to the wants of the church. And most of all, godliness itself is to have this blessed fruit. If ever we are favoured with bright and sunny glimpses of unseen things, and, as it were, a door is opened to us in heaven as to the beloved disciple, we must catch the spirit of command—"Write what thou hast seen, and send it to the churches." Our own happy experience, our own communion with the Lord, is to render us a full fountain of life and peace to the thousands of our brethren. For this, from first to last, is the perpetual law of the Divine bounty, that its seed is in itself, to diffuse His goodness more widely. "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." "Let your light so shine before men that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven.

"And to brotherly kindness, love." The first stage in the descent of the soul, when it has been in the mount with God, is to the congregation of the Lord, the assembly of his true servants. On them first and most nearly the believer is to pour out the treasures of grace he has received. But he must not confine his love to the household of God. He must be a child of his heavenly Father, who makes his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on

the just and the unjust. The love of the Christian, in like manner, must embrace the whole family of mankind. He is one of a royal priesthood, whose office is to have compassion on the ignorant who are out of the way. Hence his heart should yearn over the wanderers. His noblest acts of devotion to God, should lead to answering fulness of zeal for perishing souls. His bright glimpses, on the mount, of the coming kingdom, should lead him to a deeper tenderness of love to those who lie in their sins, oppressed of the devil, here in the valley of death. Here is the grace which crowns and completes the Christian life. It is a love whose source and root is faith, and knowledge the food by which it is nourished. It is a love, revealing itself in holy courage, and exercising itself in temperance and self-denial, and persevering in its labours. It is a love which rises first into direct and holy fellowship with God, and then descends, charged with the richest treasures of heaven, to dispense its showers of blessing first on God's household, the church of true believers, and then upon all the children of sin and sorrow in a fallen world. It is a love which is the image of God himself, the brightest triumph of His grace, and the lively pattern, before the world, of His infinite and eternal goodness. O how blessed is this description of the true believer and his course! Well may it be said of this heavenly temple, when it is finished,—The top-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings of gladness, saying, Grace, grace unto it.

And now, my brethren, in closing, fix on your

hearts these two inquiries. First, is this progress already begun? Have you that faith in Christ, without which you can neither live nor move in this heavenly pathway, but are still dead in trespasses and sins? If there be no progress, it is a fearful sign that there is no life, but that you are still dead in the sight of God. To you the charge applies, and O lay it to the heart—"Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

Next, if this progress is indeed begun, how is it advancing now? Are you aiming at progress still, or are you content with your present state, and think it enough to be safe, without an abundant entrance into God's kingdom? Beware of such a delusion. Only in advancing can you be really safe: when you cease to go forward, you fall back towards perdition. Copy then the spirit of another Apostle, and while you read these words of St. Peter, take up that holy resolution—"This one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus." Be you also thus minded. Add grace to grace, and strength to strength, from faith, the root and fountain, to pure, heavenly love, the full ripe fruit, the ever widening and overflowing stream; and then the crowning promise will be fulfilled in your happy experience, "and an abundant entrance be administered to you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

SERMON IX.

HEBREWS x. 29.

OF HOW MUCH SORER PUNISHMENT, SUPPOSE YE, SHALL HE BE THOUGHT WORTHY, WHO HATH TRODDEN UNDER FOOT THE SON OF GOD, AND HATH COUNTED THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, WHEREWITH HE WAS SANCTIFIED, AN UNHOLY THING, AND HATH DONE DESPITE UNTO THE SPIRIT OF GRACE?

WE have now unfolded, from the words of St. Peter, the blessed course of those who receive and welcome the gospel of Christ. The fountain of all their strength is in the promises of God, exceeding great and infinitely precious. Hence they derive the streams of grace, ever enlarging as they flow, like the waters which Ezekiel saw, from the sanctuary of God. Faith is the earliest grace in their hearts, love their crown and perfection, and their issue is an abundant entrance into the kingdom of glory.

We must now turn to a more painful subject, which needs however to be faithfully unfolded—the guilt and danger of those who reject the

gospel. It is here revealed to us in terms impressive and solemn beyond measure. May we approach it in the same spirit, with a deep sense of the vastness of eternal things, and the misery of even one soul, upon whom the solemn threatening shall be fulfilled. Let us meditate, first, on the aggravated guilt, and next, on the fearful danger, of those who put away from them the salvation of Christ.

I. The guilt of those who reject the gospel is here described, under three distinct charges. They trample under foot the Son of God. They treat that blood of the new covenant, by which they have been set apart, unholy and worthless. And, lastly, they repay with despite that gracious Spirit, who condescends to dwell in the hearts of sinners, and to prepare them for the coming judgment.

The unbeliever "tramples underfoot the Son of God." How startling and solemn is this expression, used here to denote his guilt! The figure may be thus explained. Let us conceive of one who was living when our Lord was on the earth. Let us suppose that he is an eye-witness to all the gracious acts of the Saviour. He traces his nightly prayers and daily labours, his sore temptation in the wilderness, his works of mercy, and his words of loving-kindness. He is present in all those hours of suffering which the Lord endured from the contradiction of sinners, and beholds the miracles of healing and mercy, so various and wonderful, of which the life of our blessed Lord was full. He then

follows him to the hour and the scene of his last conflict. He hears his gracious words of comfort to his sorrowing disciples, and beholds the Lord of glory washing their feet in his great humility of love. He follows to the garden, and witnesses the sorrow of that hour of darkness. He hears the confession, wrung from his heart by deepest anguish within—"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." He beholds that amazing sight, the Lord of glory prostrate on the earth, in agony and bloody sweat, enduring the curse for sinners. But instead of wonder and admiration, there is the smile of derision. Instead of gushing tears of godly sorrow, his lips are curled as in the mockery of scorn. Not content with such distant tokens of heartless aversion, he draws near to the suffering Lord of glory, and tramples with his feet on that sacred body, while prostrate in agony in the dust. Can we conceive of a sin more unnatural and detestable than this? Does not the bare supposition revolt us, as a blasphemy too foul, a contempt and cruelty too monstrous, even for the fallen heart of man?

Yet this, my brethren, is the exact figure which the Spirit of God has here employed, to describe the guilt of all who reject the gospel. Viewed in the light of heaven, and read by the unerring eye of God, the sin, the cruelty, and the blasphemy, are the very same. If any of you is now refusing to receive the gospel in its power, this charge is aimed against you. True, you may never have seen the Lord Jesus; but

still He has been manifestly set forth before your eyes, crucified among you. You have the full record of his labours and sufferings. You have heard and known that all these sufferings were for you, and that your iniquities were laid on him as a heavy burden. You know that every pang which tore the heart of the Saviour drew all its keenness from our sins. You know that the very design for which he endured them was to destroy the works of the devil, and to redeem us from all iniquity. Knowing all these things, and having the truth before your eyes, still to continue the willing servants of sin is really to trample the Son of God under your feet. By such a course of stubborn worldliness, you despise his authority as your King, you condemn his Divine glory as the Son of God, you pour scorn upon his sufferings as the great victim of atonement, and in his very agonies despise and reject him, as utterly unworthy of your regard.

You despise his authority. He commands you to hear his voice, and receive him as your Lord and Saviour. But you reply—"Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Your message to him is the same as of the rebellious citizens—"We will not have this man to reign over us." Thus you reject his authority as King, and trample his plainest commands under your feet.

You reject him as the great sacrifice. He is "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." Your iniquity, the iniquity of us

all, was laid on him. He bore it, for our sakes, and out of love to our souls, in deepest agony. But you make void for yourselves this work of infinite love. You count yourselves safe enough without his atonement. You refuse to rest simply on the merits of his blood. Hereby you treat the offering as vain and worthless ; and, in all the merits of his wondrous sacrifice, trample the Saviour with impious sacrilege under your feet.

You reject and despise him as your Friend. He tells you that all his sufferings were in love. He loved us, and therefore gave himself for us. When he beheld the city, he wept over it. He had compassion on the multitudes, his bowels yearned over them. He stands at the door of your heart, and by his deep agonies, knocks for an entrance, and claims to be received as your best and kindest friend. But you shut him out from your souls. You cherish those sins which are his deadly enemies, and have wrung the life-blood from his heart. You thrust away his offered friendship ; or, like Judas, accept it in empty show, merely to betray him the more. And thus while you refuse and scorn him as your friend, you trample him underfoot in those agonies which are the seal of his love.

Sins against the gospel of Christ are indeed sins against Christ himself. He says of his messengers, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me." Every covetous man, in God's sight, is a Judas, betraying the Lord for pieces of silver. Every envious man is, in God's sight, as Annas

and Caiaphas, who for envy delivered up the Lord of glory. Every despiser of God's word is one of those who passed by the cross, wagging their heads, and saying, "He trusted in God, let him deliver him, if he will have him." The absence of our Lord in his body, from our world, does not make sins against his love less heinous. And thus, in the view of God's Spirit, those who in this day reject the message of salvation, are as guilty as though they were present in Gethsemane; and with their own feet trampled on the Son of God in the hour of his agony. Surely this thought should arouse you to deep searching of heart, and lead you each one to ask, with the apostles, "Lord is it I?"

But there is here a second charge brought against every unbeliever, who has heard the gospel, and continues to reject it. He has counted the blood of the cross wherewith he has been sanctified, an unholy thing.

There is a sanctification, which begins in faith and is crowned with love. In this the unbeliever has no part; it belongs only to the true children of God. Their hearts are purified by faith, and their affections are elevated by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost. But there is another sanctification which belongs to the whole visible church of Christ. They are all separated visibly from the world for the service of God. A mark is set upon them that they belong to Christ. They wear his name, they are sealed as his own professing people. Like the vessels of the sanctuary, they are devoted to sacred uses, and

brought under the bond of a Divine covenant. Thus all Israel were baptized unto Moses in the Red Sea. Thus all of them, at the foot of Sinai, entered into covenant with God, as a holy people. In this Epistle, and that to the Corinthians, St. Paul refers to both events as patterns of the state and character of the Christian Church. So also the unbelieving husband is said to be sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife by the believing husband.

In this sense all baptized Christians, who have heard the gospel, are here said to be sanctified by the blood of the covenant. Their state resembles that of Israel, when the blood of the Passover was sprinkled on the door, that the destroying angel might pass over them. So the Church are visibly separated from a fallen world, and by virtue of the blood of atonement, are brought within the range of Divine promise, and countless privileges are heaped upon them. It is that precious blood shed on the cross, which turns aside the stroke of vengeance, and spares them for a time within the regions of grace. It is that blood of Divine merit, which procures them a part in all the outward privileges of the gospel. It is the same precious blood which infuses all its dignity into the name they bear, as Christians, the disciples of him who died on the cross and rose again. It is that blood which is ever set before their consciences by the Spirit of God, as shed for their sakes, that it might be sprinkled on their souls, and free them from

eternal condemnation. There is a new covenant of free promise, of which this precious blood is the divine seal, and in that covenant they are invited to a share. All things are theirs in gift, by the virtue of that atoning blood, which they professedly receive; and on their belief of the promise, it becomes theirs in possession also.

But the unbeliever counts this blood of the covenant an unholy thing. He despises that precious offering, which might be the means of countless blessings to his soul. He reckons it, as the word denotes, a common thing. The blood of the Son of God is to him of no more account than the blood of those thieves who were crucified by his side. He neglects its infinite worth, he despises the agonies of the Lord Jesus, and puts away from him all the benefits which the covenant of love would otherwise convey to his soul.

There is a third mark here given us of the unbeliever's guilt. "He hath done despite to the Spirit of grace." The Holy Spirit is here described by a most endearing title of love. He is the Spirit of grace, because he also, like the Father and the Son, is full of grace and truth. He can descend, in the fulness of his grace, to dwell in the hearts of sinners. There is a deep tenderness in this Holy Spirit of God, which prompts all his secret operations of love to the soul. He is gracious when he strives with rebellious sinners, and bears with their perverseness. He is gracious when he bows the heart

of the repenting prodigal, and restores him to his father's house. He is gracious when he quickens the dull faith of his people, animates their hopes, and inflames their love. Every step in his secret work of renewal flows from unbounded grace. And the title belongs to him in a further sense. He is the secret author of all grace in the hearts of God's people. Every good thought, and word, and work, is the fruit of his holy influence. Where he comes, there is liberty; and where he dwells, there is joy and love. His delight is to renew the souls of men in the image of Christ, and to make them pure as he is pure, and gracious as he is gracious. How deep is his condescension, to dwell in hearts so polluted and sinful! How great is his patience, to bear with such hourly perverseness! How boundless is that grace which is never weary to bless, with inward blessings, even the unthankful and unworthy!

But you who reject the gospel are doing despite to this Spirit of grace. You thrust him out of your hearts. You grieve his holiness by daily unbelief. You quench his gracious influences by the willing choice of sin. In the very temple of your hearts, where he would delight to dwell, you insult him with the foulest abominations before his eyes. You do despite to his holiness by impure and hateful lusts. You throw scorn on his love by your unbelief. You dishonour his presence by a total and contemptuous neglect. You scorn his work of grace by a stubborn pursuit of sin. Your pride and unbelief are a con-

stant affront to Him whose condescension is infinite, and who delights in the person and glorious work of the Son of God.

What is the life of the sinner who rejects the gospel, but one continual mockery of the Spirit of grace? His prayers are a mockery, for he asks only amiss, to consume it on his lusts. He sins under the eye of infinite holiness. The most gracious invitations he turns from with contempt. The most precious promises he casts aside as worthless. The Spirit pleads with him, but he stops his ears to the voice. He resists, he grieves, he vexes, he quenches that Holy Spirit, in the most tender and gracious offices of love.

How solemn and affecting is the picture which the Apostle has here drawn! And, my brethren, it is written for our admonition, "on whom the ends of the world are come." We are exposed to this danger; nay, many of you, from sabbath to sabbath, fulfil the warning yourselves. The truth is set before you, but you neglect it. The gospel is preached to you, but in practice you despise it. The love of Christ is proclaimed, but no response of love is awakened in your souls. What, then, is your real state before the heart-searching Judge? You are trampling under foot the Son of God; and treat the blood of Christ, by which you are set apart for God's service, as a worthless thing; and repay the ever-gracious Spirit himself with secret scorn and mockery. O that every one of you might see his true condition, not in the deceitful glass

of worldliness and pride, but as it is clearly and solemnly revealed to us in the true sayings of God.

II. But let us now turn to the other truth which these words announce, the fearful punishment of such rejecters of the gospel. The Apostle renders it more impressive, by turning it into a solemn inquiry, addressed to their own consciences—"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy?"

The Apostle here refers to the punishment of sinners, who had transgressed the law of Moses. Two or three witnesses were to agree in convicting them of the crime, whether sabbath-breaking, idolatry, adultery, or murder. They were then brought out before the congregation. The witnesses bore evidence against the criminal in their sight. Then the witnesses themselves first threw stones upon him, and afterwards the whole congregation, till he was buried under the heap, and thus solemnly devoted to death. He perished without mercy under two or three witnesses.

Such was the punishment of the offender under the law; but how much sorer will be the punishment of those who reject the gospel? They will be brought before a more solemn assembly and a more august tribunal. Their shame will be more complete, their conviction fuller, and their sentence more dreadful.

The sinner under the law was brought before the assembly at the gate of his own city. There was something to awaken the conscience, in this summons of all his neighbours to bear witness

to his crime. But he who rejects the salvation of Christ must stand in a larger congregation. When the nations are assembled at the bar of Christ, then he must appear to receive his sentence. His doom will be fixed under the eyes of the assembled universe. Men and angels, in countless numbers, shall be present in that solemn day. Our Lord himself, time after time, impresses the truth upon us, how public the sentence will be—"Of him will the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels." How glorious the assembly of that day! and, O how sore and awful the punishment—to be put openly to shame, and to have the sins discovered, in the sight of that blessed company of heaven!

The conviction will be fuller and more complete. The witnesses under the law could disclose only the outward actions of the criminal; they could not search into his heart. But in the punishment of the unbeliever, the Lord himself is a swift witness against him. "God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, good or evil." "The Lord shall come, and bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts." The conviction will be deep and entire. The sinner himself will be speechless. The aggravations of his unbelief will be exposed; the grace he has despised, the light he has quenched, and the voice of conscience which he has stifled, all will be made bare; and speechless shame, before men and angels, shall be his portion.

The sentence will be more dreadful. Under the law of Moses the body was stoned to death. But sins against the gospel have a severer doom. To them the warning applies—"Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The sentence which cannot be reversed, will proceed from the lips of the Almighty Judge—"Depart from me." Then the threatenings of God's word, so terrific and solemn, will be fulfilled. Then souls, once careless, will awake in agony of alarm, and utter that piercing cry, "Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is fearful to despise his mercy, when it is within our reach, and to deny the truth of his threatenings, till they begin to be fulfilled, and there is no remedy. The punishment under the law was sore and grievous; but how much sorer to be thrust out of the kingdom of God, to see the gates of the heavenly city for ever closed against us, and to be cast into outer darkness for ever, "where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth!" O that God may preserve each of us from running into this pit of destruction! O that we may be wise in time, and receive the gospel of the Lord, to our present peace and our eternal salvation!

For all these terrors of the coming judgment on the unbeliever will be heightened by its strict and severe righteousness. The Apostle appeals to the conscience. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be worthy?" The

greatness of the sin will be then so manifest, that God will be seen to be righteous in the final sentence. Now sin has a thousand disguises to veil its hateful deformity. And, most of all, the sin of unbelief is one which carnal minds are always ready to excuse. It can even be propounded, by those of worldly wisdom, as a great discovery of our enlightened age, that we are not responsible for our belief. But when the true light once dawns on us, these boasted discoveries will be found to be the dreams of madness. Then will every unbeliever be seen in the light of heaven, to be guilty of making the living God a liar, and of trampling under foot the Son of God. All the vain excuses of the fallen heart, for its own darkness, will then vanish. The true secret of their rejection of the gospel will then come out into full view—"They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." And thus the sentence of God will be seen to be most just. Even the unbeliever himself will be speechless; and silent adoration of the unspotted holiness of the God of vengeance will fill all the companies of heaven.

And now, my brethren, let us apply this solemn subject, in two or three practical remarks, that it may be impressed with deeper power on every conscience.

Remember, first, there are only two classes in the word of God—those who embrace the gospel with the whole heart; and those who secretly despise it. There is really in God's sight no

middle ground. "He that is not for me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." Examine, then, whether you have the marks of being among the children of God. Has the preaching of the cross been foolishness to you? or is it the power of God to your soul? Are you resting for your daily comfort in the exceeding great and precious promises of God's word? Have you a faith rooted in the dying love of Christ; and are you adding grace to grace, and pressing on toward the mark for the prize of perfect holiness and full redemption? If so, blessed are you now, and will be blessed for ever. But if none of these characters are seen in you, then the cross must be foolishness to you all. Then amidst the sound of the truth, you are strangers to its power. And of how sore a punishment, do ye suppose, God will count you worthy, if you continue thus in your unbelief. Words cannot express your guilt in *His* sight, and worlds would be far too cheap a price to save you from the approaching judgment. The sword is hung over you, even now. "He that believeth not the Son of God shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Solemn thought! Even now, while you hear or read his word in the house of God, in your houses, in your labours, in society, and in solitude, the wrath of the living God is resting on you—that wrath, which let loose for one moment, would consume you for ever. O may you all see your danger, and awaken from the sleep of death!

For consider, finally, the glorious and complete remedy that is still within your reach. You are now in the region of grace. The Spirit of grace still pleads with you. The word of grace is still sent to you. The God of all grace continues to bear with you, and the blessed Saviour, who is full of grace and truth, still yearns over you with deepest compassion and love. Now is still "the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation." There is a full atonement, by which your own sins shall be freely pardoned the moment that you believe. There is an almighty power, which can elevate your defiled spirit, and prepare it for an "inheritance with the saints in light." There is a word of grace, which is "able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified." The Lord whom you have rejected, is still waiting to be gracious, and "he is able to save to the uttermost all those who come unto God by him." Now, therefore, while the way of life is open, enter in, and without delay: "ye know not what shall be on the morrow." But to-day, while it is called to-day, you may hearken to the voice of God, and embrace the message of his love to you in Christ, for the salvation of your souls.

And you who have believed, learn also from these words to care for the souls of others. Think of the fearful curse which hangs over the unbeliever, and pray that God may deliver them. Be deep and earnest in your desires for their salvation. Keep before your eyes the greatness of the coming wrath, that your gratitude may be

more fervent to the Saviour who has delivered you from its power, and your labours more abundant to rescue those who are now sitting in darkness. One believing view of this solemn truth will make earthly things seem empty in your eyes. It will strip away the delusions of time, and will teach you to live as those who must themselves stand in judgment. May this be the effect now on all our hearts. May we be wise to consider the latter end of the sinner, and flee from his terrible doom ; while we are quickened in our Christian course, by the blessed hope of everlasting life, and the crown of glory reserved for all the servants of the Lord.

SERMON X.

REVELATION XXII. 11, 12.

HE THAT IS UNJUST, LET HIM BE UNJUST STILL; AND HE THAT IS FILTHY, LET HIM BE FILTHY STILL; AND HE THAT IS RIGHTEOUS, LET HIM BE RIGHTEOUS STILL; AND HE THAT IS HOLY, LET HIM BE HOLY STILL. AND, BEHOLD, I COME QUICKLY; AND MY REWARD IS WITH ME, TO GIVE EVERY MAN ACCORDING AS HIS WORK SHALL BE.

WE have now dwelt on the character and course of the believer and the unbeliever. To the believer the preaching of the cross is the power of God; to the unbeliever it is mere foolishness. The believer, resting on the Divine promises, advances in the way of holiness, and gains an abundant entrance into the kingdom of his Lord. The unbeliever tramples the Son of God under his feet, and prepares for himself a fearful sentence of wrath in the day of Christ. The two opposite paths and the issue to which they lead are again set before us in the text, in common with two further truths of deep importance, the present forbearance of God, which sinners pervert to their ruin, and the certainty of the judg-

ment and separation that is at hand. May the Holy Spirit be with us, while we dwell on this message of Christ. The words present to us three main lessons on the various stages both of sin and holiness, the present forbearance of God, and the sure judgment at the coming of the Lord.

I. These words set before us, first, the various degrees of sin and holiness. Sinners and believers are each described to us here, under two distinct titles, of which the second is fuller than the first. There are the unjust and the filthy, who are ripening for judgment; there are the righteous and the holy, who are preparing for glory.

“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still.” The title unjust or unrighteous, here describes plainly a character of the soul. It is the state of one whose heart is not right with God. The sinner who believes in the Lord Jesus is justified by faith. Every unbeliever abides in sin, and is unrighteous before God. He is not merely under the curse of the law. There is a root of sin in his heart, which brings forth a thousand bitter fruits of ungodliness. He defrauds God and man alike of the love which is due to them. His heart is not right in the presence of his Maker. There is a secret power of selfishness ruling in his soul, and it sends forth its bitter streams into all his actions. And hence, though sometimes there may be much that is fair in the eyes of man, he is counted unjust in the sight of God.

But there is a further stage of sin, which is here described. "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." The bitter root of an evil heart may in some produce more evident fruits of corruption than in others. There may be open crimes against the laws of man. There may be a seared and hardened conscience, when men are given up to work all uncleanness with greediness. The lusts of the flesh and the grosser pleasures of the world may bear an open sway in the heart. The restraints of decency may be cast aside, and unblushing profligacy may stalk abroad without shame, under the eye of heaven. These appear to be the filthy, whom the Spirit of God here brands under that odious name. All sin is indeed filthy in its own nature, when tried by the searching holiness of God. But there are acts and courses of sin which more openly betray the plague-spot of corruption. Of such open profligates and daring sinners the words are here spoken, and the solemn permission is given for a little time—"He that is filthy, let him be filthy still."

And here, in passing, we may gain an important lesson, to guard us from a serious and fatal error. There are many who rely on their freedom from gross outward sins, as if this were a passport to heaven. They count themselves decent, moral, and far removed from all crime, and hence infer their own safety. But, my brethren, you may not be among the openly filthy, and still be numbered with the unjust. Few go to the greatest length of open profligacy.

gacy, but many, alas, walk in the broad road of destruction. If you are unjust before God, this alone will shut you out from his kingdom. And however fair your outward conduct may seem to yourselves, you are one of the unjust if you have not a faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only by faith in him can the sinner be justified. Till then the sentence of God's law lies against you, and the root of ungodliness still abides in your heart. Be not content therefore to avoid the grosser forms of sin, but seek that living faith in the blood of Christ which alone can rank you among the righteous and holy, who are heirs of God's kingdom.

Let us now turn from the view here given us of sinners to the contrasted titles of the children of God. And here also there are two classes, and two distinct stages are implied of obedience and holiness.

"He that is righteous, let him be righteous still." By nature "there is none righteous, no not one." But there is a Divine provision by which those who have no righteousness of their own may be made righteous. In the gospel "the righteousness of God is manifested, which is by faith in Christ upon all them that believe." They are justified freely by his grace. They are accounted righteous through the dying love and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. By faith they are made one with him, and graciously accounted to have an interest in the merit of his sufferings, and the glory of his resurrection-life at the right hand of God. And now they

are righteous by inward character too. A new life has been imparted. The gift of righteousness is within them, a seed of eternal life. They come within the description of St. John—"He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as Christ is righteous." And hence in the word of God, while the sinner is ever said to be justified, with reference to his being graciously accepted through the merits of Christ, the term *righteous* is most frequently applied to him, to describe his moral character, as one whose heart is now right with God. Thus the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. "That be far from thee, that the righteous should be as the wicked? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" In this sense we are told that "righteous Lot, dwelling in Sodom, vexed his righteous soul with their unlawful deeds." The same meaning will be clear in countless passages, when we read them in simple faith as given us by the Spirit of God.

In this sense the words are employed in this text. "He that is righteous, let him be righteous still." The words describe the inward character of the true Christian. The source of this character is purely the grace of God, but its effects are real and abiding. His heart is right with God. He has respect unto all his commandments. He fears God and walks before him in uprightness, and exercises himself to have a conscience void of offence in his sight. This is the character of all real believers. All of them, from the least to the greatest, have this new

heart and right spirit, the spirit of uprightness and godly fear, by which they desire in all things to do the will of God.

But there is here also a further stage—"He that is holy, let him be holy still." More is clearly implied than in the former term. Thus St. Paul in Rom. v.—"Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for the good man some would even dare to die." Here also two stages are marked, the uprightness of sincerity, and the goodness of diffusive and earnest benevolence. And in like manner St. John speaks of three distinct stages in the Christian, as in the natural life; children, young men, and fathers in Christ.

What then are we to understand by "the holy"? What further stage of grace is here set before us? When the seed of the Divine life is planted in the soul, it dwells amidst a thicket of corruptions. There may be a stedfast purpose within to serve God, and much open and grievous infirmity may remain. There may be much worldliness in the heart, many idle words on the tongue, much unwatchfulness against sin, and many evil and corrupt tempers that have still to be subdued. The light of grace and truth may be within, as a living principle that will grow into all obedience, but it may shine very dimly, and sometimes be almost lost to the eye. But there is a further progress of grace in which its lineaments are far more clear and beautiful. The Spirit of God, as a Spirit of burning, has now consumed away much of the

dross, and the light of goodness begins to shine clearly. There is the law of kindness in the lips. The speech is always with grace, seasoned with salt. A visible stamp of holiness begins to appear on the whole man. Even the world take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus. Like Moses, when he came down from the mount, the glow of Divine love breathes from his lips and beams in his countenance. He becomes a living pattern of believers. The joy of the Lord is his strength, and puts its own blessed seal on his words and actions, so that there begins to be a visible and conspicuous aim, in all things, at the glory of God his Saviour. These are the holy who are here spoken of. They are those Christians in whom the Spirit of holiness more eminently dwells, and has more signally and manifestly prepared them for the holy city of God. They are the stars amidst the spiritual firmament, who beam forth with a steady light amidst the darkness of an unbelieving world, to shew the beauty, the power, and the excellence, of true religion, and the real service of the Lord Jesus.

And even these are to be "holy still." Whatever their progress, there is a race still to be run. Whatever grace already bestowed on them, more awaits their faithful diligence. Their Lord who has blessed them greatly, is still ready to multiply spiritual blessings upon them; and never counting that they have attained, they are still to be reaching after higher and higher attainments in righteousness and true holiness.

Such are the two classes here described, and the various degrees in each, the unjust and the filthy; the righteous and the holy. And all are still advancing, either in the way of life or of death. The unjust are becoming more unjust, and the filthy still filthier, the righteous more righteous, and the holy still holier. All are ripening, in this season of grace, for the decisive day that will fix their state for ever.

II. This leads us to the next great lesson in these words, the present forbearance of God. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still." The meaning of the passage is clearly of this kind. Now there is a suspense of judgment, and a gracious delay. The tares and the wheat are to grow together till the harvest. If sinners are resolved to go on in their sins, they may, for a little time. There is a permission in God's providence, though a solemn account will follow. The drunkard may still indulge his revels, and the licentious his wicked lusts. The worldling may still be worldly, and the scorner delight in his scorning, and drink up iniquity like water, delighting in his filthiness. And so too with the children of God. There is a time of delay, in which further progress in grace is open to them, and higher degrees of glory may be secured. He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him advance still further and higher in holiness. But soon the time of decision will come, and the eternal separation be made. Grace abused will then be followed with a fiery judgment, and grace improved with a

most blessed reward. "And behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

The great truth, therefore, which is here taught us, is the forbearance of God, and its opposite effects on the sinner and the believer. The one perverts it to his heavier ruin, and the other profits by it for his fuller advance in preparedness for the day of Christ.

The secret cause of this forbearance is the infinite love of God. He hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner. He is slow to anger, and great in power to restrain the overflowing of his own righteous indignation. He is not backward to fulfil his promise of judgment, but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Here is the true secret of his forbearance. His deep wisdom indeed secures thereby many other unknown purposes of grace; but free, simple love to the souls of the lost and perishing is the key-note in all this harmony of the Divine counsels.

What a wonderful thought, then, my brethren, is here opened before us! Why has not the trumpet already sounded, and the dead long ago been wakened from their slumbers? Why do the stars still observe their silent courses, and the sun shine afresh daily on the just and the unjust? Why does the earth still abide as from the days of the fathers, and seed time and harvest, summer and winter, do not cease? It is not the firmness of the laws of nature. They

would long ago have been overruled by a mightier and deeper law of righteousness, which demands judgment against the transgressor, and an open vindication of the outraged authority of God. No, the secret lies deeper in the heart of the Most High. The Lord is long suffering, not willing that we should perish. There is a mystery of forbearance which alone sustains the course of nature, and stays the fiery judgments of the Lord. Around us there is a world lying in sin and wickedness, that rises, as from Sodom, with a loud and continual cry for judgment. Above there is a holiness so pure and so full, that even the heavens are not clean before it, and the angels stand charged in its sight with folly. But there is an infinite depth of forbearance, which stays the course of deserved wrath, and gives a further space to sinners for repentance. And there is also infinite Wisdom standing by the side, presiding over the whole, and watching when the fit moment shall arrive, that forbearance itself should be forborne, and justice delay her sentence no longer. O what a deep mystery of contending, yet harmonious attributes, faith can discern in that Providence, where the sinner sees nothing but an iron necessity, the mechanism of nature, and blind laws that act without a lawgiver, and carry on the universe without the need of a God! No, such is not the secret reason that all things continue as from the beginning. The true cause is that long suffering is the attribute which now rules in the Providence of God. But the time will come when

even long-suffering must cease, and the Lord come out of his place to visit the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity. Then "the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."

But the text describes to us the effects of this forbearance, on the sinner and the believer.

What is the effect on the sinner? Its gracious purpose is to lead him to repentance by the goodness of God. But men in general abuse it to an opposite result. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." They view it, in practice, as a license to sin. They fancy that they may go on without danger, indulging their corruptions. They bless themselves, saying, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst." And thus, by their blindness, they turn the very season of grace into a source of heavier and deeper ruin.

Now here the Spirit of God, with a solemn warning, meets and exposes their folly. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still." You may for a season, with no outward restraint from divine Providence, indulge your sins. In your blindness, you may think that "the Lord hath forsaken the earth, and seeth not." The time of grace is such as may seem like a direct permission to go on boldly in your rebellion. Walk then in the way of your heart, and in the light of your eyes. Follow the bent of your

own evil desires, and let the filthy bury himself deeper than ever in the mire of his own filthiness. You may do this,—but only for a little moment, and then the judgment will follow. Then every added sin will have heaped a treasure of wrath against you. Then outraged patience and unsullied justice will assert their rights, and visit you with a deeper condemnation. Yet for a little time, “he that is filthy let him be filthy still;” but “behold I come quickly.” Then shall the account be taken, and though you thought wickedly that I was like unto yourselves, “I will reprove you, and set before you the things ye have done.” Now consider this, ye that forget God; for “my reward is with me, to give every man as his work shall be.”

How fearful and affecting is this thought, that we may so terribly pervert to our own ruin this season of rich and sovereign forbearance! O let it lead you to inquire whether such be your state, and this perverse reasoning is passing through your hearts! If so, be sure that a solemn reckoning awaits you, when forbearance shall cease and judgment begin.

But the same delay, so grievously abused by the sinner, is a source of countless blessings to the true servants of God. “He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” Here there is no irony of severe indignation; but a divine command, a gracious exhortation of love. You have yet, the Saviour says to his people, a time of grace, see that you improve it to the uttermost. Higher

blessings are still open to you—greater diligence on earth, and fuller glory in heaven. Whether your present place be higher or lower in the school of wisdom, you have much still to learn, and much work still to do in my vineyard. Use this time, then, with all zeal and devotedness of labour. Be more singly upright than ever in my service. Labour after larger measures of holiness; seek for fuller supplies of that grace which I am most ready to bestow. I count it more blessed to give, than you can account it to receive. “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” No step in your course shall be fruitless, no act of love shall fail of a blessing: not even a cup of cold water, given in faith, shall be forgotten when I appear. “He that is holy, let him be holy still; and behold my reward is with me, to give to every man as his work shall be.”

III. And now, finally, let us consider the judgment which is to follow, after this long season of merciful forbearance. “And behold, I come quickly.” We are taught in these words the certainty and the nearness of judgment, its contrast with present long-suffering, and the universal sentence that will ensue.

The judgment is certain. “Behold, I come.” He whose name is truth, and who cannot lie, has repeatedly and solemnly declared that he will return, and judge the world in righteousness. It is true that worldly hearts despise the warning. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the

sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." The scoffers of the last days deride the thought of the Saviour's return—"Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning." The laws of nature, as they fondly conceive, must go on unbroken for ever. No voice of God is to break the silence of their eternal course; no miracle to disturb the discoveries of science; the same circle of perpetual change is to continue, and no trumpet ever to arouse the sleeping dead. Whatever gave the first impulse to the wheels, the mighty machine of the universe is to move on, sustained by its internal powers, without any room being left for the immediate hand of God. Every human will may exert, and does exert daily, a direct power over nature; but he who formed those wills is alone to be excluded, and doomed to be an idle and powerless spectator of laws that continue without change in their own undisturbed omnipotence. Vain and senseless notion! He that formed the ear, shall he not hear? He that planted the eye, shall not he see? and he that created earthly judges, shall not he punish? He who created all things, sustains them; and He who sustains, will restore; and His almighty voice be heard at the last—"Behold, I make all things new." He hath sworn by himself. "Every knee shall bow unto me, and every tongue shall confess unto God." Are we told that the laws of nature must remain unbroken? The highest and holiest of all laws, unbroken from all eternity, is

the faithfulness of every word of the living God. Is this law, perpetual and unchangeable, to bend itself to the vain dreams of ignorant and unbelieving men? No, surely; the highest science is to know the true God, and the faithfulness of every word that proceeds from his lips. Compared with one sentence of that word, heaven and earth themselves are empty shadows; and the laws of nature, however sure in their own place, veil their light, like the stars, before the sun-bright splendour of his infinite holiness and everlasting truth. "He hath said, and shall he not do it? He hath spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

The judgment, then, however scoffers may deride, or worldlings may neglect it, is sure and certain. The living God has spoken, and his word cannot fail. "For this end Christ hath died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living." Every suffering he endured in the garden and on the cross, is a pledge of that return which is here proclaimed, and the judgment which is to follow. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the promise and the threatening will be surely fulfilled; and the proudest votary of worldly science, the most hardened scoffer of these last times, shall be compelled to echo the words of the Psalmist, and say, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth in the earth."

And this judgment is drawing near. The message of heaven is fitted to strike the most care-

less heart. Behold, I come *quickly*. True, eighteen centuries have gone by, since the words were uttered to the beloved John in this parting vision; but in the sight of God "a thousand years are as one day." And now that time, which was short in itself from the first, has almost run out its course, and the mystery of God, as this very book reveals to us, will soon be finished. The sixth vial of judgment is fast draining from the bowl of the angel, and the voice even now is addressed by our Lord to the Church—"Behold, I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth." This warning is almost the last sound that died away on the harp of prophecy, while the heart of the prophet thrilled with a welcome of joy. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly. Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus." And still the same key-note resounds, at the touch of God's Holy Spirit, in the hearts of his people. "The whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." While the shallow voice of worldly science is exclaiming, All things continue! there is a secret whisper in reply from all creation, echoing the loud voice of the souls beneath the altar—"How long, O Lord, faithful and true?" Soon the shadows will have passed away, and the morning will appear. Soon the reign of sin and death will have ceased, and the kingdom of righteousness be established for ever. Soon shall the sun be confounded, and the moon ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall

reign before his ancients gloriously. Soon the days of long-suffering and forbearance will have gone by. The unjust can indulge his ungodliness, the filthy delight in his filthiness no longer; but all must appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, and give in their account before the tribunal of God.

But the words imply also the contrast between the present season of grace, and the coming hour of judgment. Now the unjust may be unjust still, sinking deeper and deeper in ignorance and rebellion. Now also the filthy may bury himself lower and lower in the mire of his own lusts. But then, all will be changed. The days of probation will be ended. The merciful forbearance to strike will be followed by the strict execution of righteous vengeance. It is like the harvest fields of earth. After the seed has been sown, and while it is growing slowly, the field may be left in unbroken stillness: no foot may be seen to trespass amidst its green and waving furrows. "The earth bringeth forth of itself, first the blade, then the ear; afterward the full corn in the ear." And so in this nobler harvest of immortal souls. Now the great Husbandman looks on in silence, while the tares and the wheat are ripening under the sunshine of his forbearing mercy. But soon iniquity will be ripe for judgment, and grace in the hearts of his people be ripe for a translation to glory. Then, as in earthly harvests, how great and sudden the change! "Immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is

come." Then the voice of the angel reapers will be heard in the field, and their presence be seen where all before was one silence of unbroken worldliness, and the very being of angels a truth forgotten and despised. Then will be the busy work of the ingathering, the tares for the burning, and the wheat for the garner. "He shall send forth his angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather his elect from the four winds." How solemn, how surprising the change! How total the contrast to the dreams of false science, which acts and reasons as if the living God had forsaken the earth! All that has been noted for ages in his book of remembrance, while in deep and awful silence He has looked down upon the nations, will then be found in those records which lie opened before him. The petty and vain counsels of man, the feverish dreams of worldliness, the proud boastings of the scorers, will pass away, like the dream of a night-vision, before the first glimpse of that returning glory. Then will be seen the vast importance of this mortal life, as one continual preparation for the kingdom of God. Every thought and every action here will then be found to have been a living seed, whose fruits of joy or misery will grow, and increase, and unfold themselves for ever.

For let us now consider, in the last place, the universal extent of this coming judgment. "My reward is with me, to render to every man as his work shall be." There is here no exception. The good and the evil, and each in their various

stages of sin and holiness, shall pass under a strict review, and receive a righteous sentence from the lips of the Supreme Judge.

The good and the evil, alike, have a part in the sentence here announced. It is to render to "every man," unjust or righteous, filthy or holy, "according as his work shall be." The dead works of the sinner, works of darkness and rebellion, will bring down a fearful curse upon his soul. The work of faith and labour of love, in the believer, will be joined with that blessed welcome,—“Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” The words clearly apply to all the classes just described,—the just and the holy, no less than the filthy and unjust. It is to pervert and wrest the word of God, to suppose that two only, of the four classes, will receive “according as their works shall be.” The righteous Judge, with his own voice, sets before us the rule and law of his own judgment. Now he reveals himself as the free fountain of grace, and bestows freely, upon those who ask him, the gifts of his own Spirit. Hereafter, as the Moral Governor of the earth, he will make a double inquiry. He will decide on the presence or absence of works of genuine love; and then on the number, depth, and aggravations of the works of sin, or the scanty or abundant measure of the fruits of righteousness. The ground of the believer’s acceptance is the work of Christ, and his full atonement; but the test and measure of his reward, the fruits wrought in his heart and life by the

quickenings Spirit of God. Thus will grace itself reign through righteousness. The freeness of the gospel is linked with strict and impartial equity of the King of righteousness; and what he himself has joined in his own person and work, let not man presumptuously put asunder. With Him forgiveness itself is awful, that He may be feared; and with Him it is one proof of infinite mercy, that He renders to every man according to his work.

But this judgment implies, not only the separation of the good and the evil; but also various degrees of punishment and reward.

“I will render to every man as his work shall be.” The unjust shall receive according to the depth of his injustice, and the filthy according to the measure of his filthiness. He that knew his Lord’s will and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes. It shall be more tolerable for Sodom than for Capernaum, and for Tyre and Sodom than for Chorazin and Bethsaida. The fuller the light, the heavier the punishment if that light is abused. And hence the solemn warning in Hebrews addressed to Christians, beyond Jews or heathens, when they reject the gospel and sin against its promise. They will be worthy of a sorer punishment, and sink into ruin, crushed under the load of a heavier condemnation. O that careless, ungodly Christians were indeed wise with heavenly wisdom! O that they understood this solemn truth, and would consider their latter end!

But again, the same truth applies also to the

people of God. "He that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still; and my reward is with me, to render to every one as his work shall be." Our Lord clearly assigns it as a reason for persevering growth in holiness, that they will hereby attain a more abundant reward. "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully." The reward of the righteous man our Lord himself distinguishes from the reward of the prophet, or of an eminent teacher of righteousness and more devoted servant of God. The equity of God does not, and cannot cease, because, in the believer, its exercise is blended with that of a higher attribute, free and sovereign mercy. Various degrees of holiness must still find a strict award; and higher and lower seats, as our Lord himself teaches, are prepared for the guests in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Nay, all nature teaches the same lesson. Everywhere variety reigns in the works of God. But if we ask where it is most conspicuous, it is not in the lowest forms of dull and lifeless matter; but in the most lovely and beautiful flowers, or in the noblest work of the lower creation, the human form and countenance, the body of man, and his immortal spirit. The voice of nature concurs with the voice of conscience, and the repeated declarations of the word of God. All who fear Him, both small and great, shall receive an abundant reward; and in every case, sovereign mercy shall be its eternal fountain. But the

streams which make glad the city of God shall be endless in their variety, and the vessels which receive the heavenly treasures of joy shall be various also. All shall be full, but each in its own measure. The most faithful on earth shall be most honourable in the courts of heaven; and those who have the deepest baptism of suffering for Christ's sake, be nearest to Him whose soul was poured out unto death, and whom God has therefore exalted above every name, both in earth and in heaven.

How solemn and weighty is the message here set before us! This crowns the whole system of Divine truth, and combines it into one deep and earnest appeal to the consciences of men. The Lord who is present with us unseen, the Lord who suffered for us on the cross, will soon return in his glory. The season of grace will close for ever. The holy and the unholy will then give account for all their works. Those who have sinned most deeply shall be beaten with many stripes, and those who have laboured and suffered most earnestly in the cause of Christ, shall reap the most abundant reward. And that reward the Saviour will bring with him when he appears. To him that overcometh he will give power over the nations, and a place on his throne. All things shall be theirs for ever. Soon the deep silence of nature will be broken by the voice of the archangel and the trump of God. Who shall abide the day of his coming? How shall we be found ready to enter in, before the door is shut against the foolish virgins? Our

Lord himself gives us a plain reply—"Blessed are they that keep his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city." And how shall sinners unholy in themselves, obtain power for so great a work? "If a man abide in me," the same voice declares to him, "the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

May such, my brethren, be our character here on earth, and our blessed lot in the day of Christ. Remember the ceaseless presence of the living God, your Maker. Let your life be one of continual faith in the Son of God, who loved you, and gave himself for your souls. Draw near to this fountain of life, and drink from it daily, and abide ever in him who is the living Vine. Remember your own heart's deceitfulness, that you may seek unto Him for grace and pardon. Remember that he has died to save you, to redeem you from all sin, and to fill you with zeal in his blessed service. Search your own heart, and see whether the knowledge of his love is melting and renewing your soul; or whether his cross be only an empty sound, of less worth in your eyes, and of less influence on your lives, than the vain follies of the world. Covet earnestly the best gifts of Divine grace, and advance from day to day in a course of continual holiness. And then look forward to the solemn account at

the judgment seat of your God. Let his voice be ever sounding in your ears—"Behold, I come quickly." O that we may thus improve the season of grace; that old and young, parents and children, masters and servants, rich and poor, the ministers of Christ, and the people entrusted to their charge, may thus walk in the light of these solemn warnings and these gracious promises, till all shall be found ready in that great day when the Lord shall appear.

If such, my brethren, be our state, how blessed and glorious will be the future reward! Instead of the fearful doom of the sinner, the gnashing of teeth and outer darkness, you will be caught up into the presence of the Lord. Your happy souls will be numbered among his people. You will stand with boldness in the judgment, and be found in the congregation of the righteous. The voice of mercy will go forth to greet you; and while the welcome words, "Come ye blessed of my Father," proceed from the lips of the Judge, his angel ministers will receive you, with joy and gladness, into the everlasting habitations prepared for his people. May we so lay to heart the truth of his word, so rest on his promises, and so obediently walk in his commandments, that all these blessed and glorious hopes may be ours for ever and ever.

THE END.

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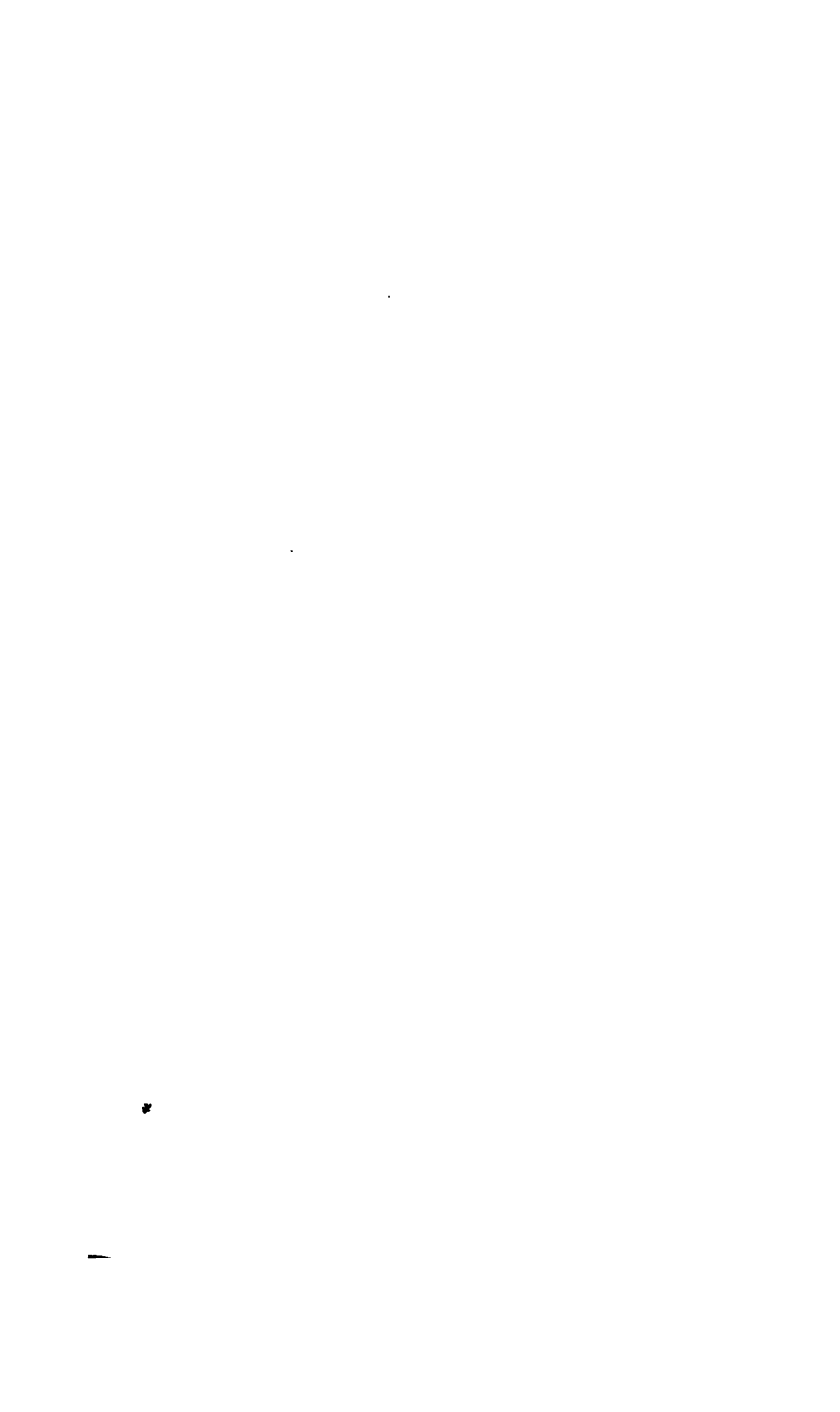
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